Day 2, April 21, 2012: Afternoon Session - 2:00-2:30 p.m. Rethinking Newsrooms — Why the Intersection of Technology and Content is Our Next Challenge

- **Chair: Robert Quigley,** Senior Lecturer, School of Journalism, University of Texas at Austin
- Keynote Speaker: Raju Narisetti, Managing Editor, Wall Street Journal Digital Network
- **Q&A:** Robert Quigley and Raju Narisetti

Robert Quigley: OK. As Rosental said, I came from the Austin American Statesman. We did some really exciting things there while I was there. Part of the reason we did is because we had full support of management that understood the importance of digital journalism and innovation.

And so I'm really excited to introduce Raju Narisetti, because he is one of the really great managing editors out there. He was managing editor of the Washington Post up until February. And he just recently—well, in February—started being Deputy Managing Editor of the Wall Street Journal and also a managing editor of their Digital Platforms. So, I'm going to hand it over to Raju.

Raju Narisetti: I've been at the Journal now for eight weeks, so I'm definitely not speaking for the Wall Street Journal. I haven't been at the Washington Post for about eight weeks, so I am not speaking for the Washington Post. [laughter] I'm basically speaking for 20 years of being in this business, starting and running newsrooms in three different continents and spending a lot of time worrying about our future, not in an abstract sense, but worrying about it with the P&L to manage and a whole bunch of journalistic jobs to kind of try to preserve.

So, what I'm going to do is to kind of lay down some truisms, if you will, that I'm seeing, and then talk a little bit about what might lie ahead for those of us who are trying to kind of preserve significant journalistic endeavors in large newsrooms, you know, be it at the Washington Post or the New York Times or at the Wall Street Journal.

The advantage of going kind of last, really, in terms of the keynotes and presentations is that a lot of what I was going to say has been touched upon, so I'll try to kind of refer back to some of these statements, whether it's by Richard about Google or Aron Pilhofer or some of the others as we go along.

My basic premise is that the future of our business and newsrooms is going to really play out at the intersection of technology and content, and I'll kind of make a case for why that is. There's a lot of talk about the future of journalism and my view is that the recent past, the current, and the future primarily is about digital audiences. Some newspapers like the Wall Street Journal are still growing their print circulation or readership, but by and large I think everybody has stopped pretending that newspapers in print form will ever grow. So, this is kind of the reality of most of us. If anybody talks about digital audiences and mobile and other things being the future, it's about reminding them that it is our current and has been our recent past as well.

A lot of energy is spent in these conferences and at newsrooms talking about integrating print and online, especially for big media companies. It feels like that's something that's really Web 1.0. I mean, if you haven't done it now, you pretty much don't. No point in kind of focusing on it. There are a lot bigger issues that are coming down the pike.

I'm prone to telling journalists about this, that there is no circulation marketing department when it comes to digital audiences. In print, there was somebody who would kind of try to drum up subscriptions. Online, being part of a journalist in 2012 is thinking about your role as trying to get as many people as possible to read as much of your journalism. And that is your job; it's nobody else's job. The reason I say this is because a lot of things we're asking journalists to do, the initial reaction tends to be, "But is that journalist when you talk about SEO [or] when you talk about social media?" And oftentimes it's seen as something beyond the call of journalism. And ideally, we want to kind of dispel that to say that if you are a journalist today, this is all part of being a journalist.

And this is something that's really at the base of what we all need to do, which is that, because of the choices that readers have, both in terms of platforms, where they are, and where they get content, as well as in terms of content.... I mean, you could get a lot of Washington Post, New York Times, [and] Wall Street Journal content if you just spend your time on Huffington Post. You really don't have to kind of come to these original sources, if you will. So, they tend to be very promiscuous, because it's easy to do that. If you're a print reader, you are in a city, chances are that there's one newspaper, and you're kind of geographically trapped. Historically, that's how newspapers have made money, because it's hard to kind of get a second or third paper in if you didn't like your hometown paper. But digitally that's not really the case. It's a free-for-all. They are promiscuous and getting more and more promiscuous.

So the challenge is, how do we first bring them to our journalism and our brand and then kind of make them come back? Meaning, they want to go around and sample the wares everywhere else. Fine, let them do it, because they can at the click of a button. But what can we do to kind of bring them back to our journalism? The reason I call it a 'virtual' newsroom is it is no

longer about bringing them back to our website. It's about bringing them to our journalism where they want it. You know, there are a billion people on Facebook. Our journalism needs to be there. We can't expect them all come to our website.

There are different financial implications of our journalism traveling where the audience is. But as far as journalists [are] concerned, it doesn't matter where they are consuming it, and I think that's part of our challenge as well. So, what does it take? I mean, most people focus on.... Especially, Bob Metcalfe was talking about the pride in what we do and a false sense of importance. It is always relied on that everybody else is not doing great journalism, but *we* are doing great journalism. But increasingly, the future is not necessarily just about great journalism, and it's just not going to be enough. In my mind, what is going to make a difference in terms of bringing people back is turning great content into great experiences.

And I'll walk you through a little bit of, what do I mean by an experience, but my feeling is great content is available now at a lot of places. I mean, let's talk about the elections. You can get really good coverage of the elections from Politico to the Washington Post to the New York Times to a bunch of things, to Purple.com. I think that was what the site was that Bob Metcalfe mentioned earlier today. So, just having good content, having smart content is not enough. You need to kind of create an experience, because that's how you're going to engage your reader. And this is where we're going to win or lose our future, not just by having great content and expecting people to kind of really discover it.

So, this is typically what happened in most newsrooms. We all began with words. We got pretty good at it. At some point, newspapers, you know, folks like the Wall Street Journal added it at the very end, but people started adding pictures to your stories. Then they started adding charts. Podcasts came along and were a big craze. Then we moved to galleries. We've now gone to interactive graphics. There was a lot of conversation about adding databases and allowing people to do things with it. And increasingly, we are now adding video to our journalism. At the Wall Street Journal, for example, the print, the old print newsroom produces five to six hours of original video every day now. And so we are doing all this, which is great, because all this adds up to a great experience.

The good news is that pieces of these, you know, the words, the charts, the databases, and you've seen a bunch of examples today, we've gotten really, really good at. So, we are now doing a lot of interesting, good things on the web using platforms, using mobile devices. But the bad news is that we are not very good at turning these pieces, you know, turning a photo and a video and slideshow into a compelling experience. We do it very well for prizes. We do it very well for big projects. A bunch of examples that you saw earlier today. But more often than not, if you go to any major media company's website or their content, there's a lot of words still. Maybe there's a photo.

Maybe there's a gallery. Occasionally, there's a video. But the whole thing is not an interesting experience collectively. I think this is where there's a big gap, and this is why I keep saying that having content alone is not going to be enough or having pieces of these is not going to be enough.

So, again, going back to my premise, a great experience comes at the intersection of content and technology and being able to put it together. And by technology, I don't necessarily mean kind of the publishing systems, but I mean, how does a user experience the content that you are putting together?

And for those of us who've been spending a lot of time kind of integrating print and online newsrooms and focusing on it, you know, the real challenge is, how do you integrate your content creators with your programmers with your coders? You know, the whole hacks and hackers, how do you get them together? That's going to be our big, big ongoing and future challenge in managing this process.

So, I thought I would just put together some observations of having tried to do this for a little while now. Some of this is based off a panel that we did in Austin a few months ago at South by Southwest on a related topic. There were Jenny Lee, formerly of the New York Times, me, and a few others. So, these are some of the lessons from that.

The big initial challenge, and this morphed into this question about, what is your biggest challenge? They said, "Skepticism in the newsroom." The reason why there is skepticism in the newsroom is because the prism through which developers and the prism through which content creators look at themselves is very different. To a reporter, the code and all that is just the stuff, and what they're doing, they're reporting and writing and their amazing anecdotal lead is the art. And if you are a programmer, if you're a coder, you're a hacker, what you're doing to kind of put it all together is the fun part. [Technical difficulties with slideshow.] OK.

So, rather than kind of get into these battles about who's "art" and who's "stuff," as part of the conversation about where the story would go, can we begin those conversations in the newsroom about, so what is the user experience? Answering what Alberto said in his speech or what Brian said about usability as an art or the what-if question, you know, how is a reader going to consume this? And does that make sense to do it that way?

And the experience tends.... More often than not, even today, a lot of newsrooms tend to kind of conceive a story, look at the reporting threads, look at the sourcing, look at the pieces of content, and then turn to somebody in IT, typically a developer or programmer, and kind of say, "What can you do with this stuff?" The problem is that the great experience doesn't come from the IT Department. It's not necessarily going to come from the coders and the programmers. So, one of the answers and a lot of people are

trying [this] is kind of this idea of like embedding developers into the news floor, into the newsroom.

These are some of the lessons that I learned at the Washington Post, where we have moved — where they have moved now into an embedded model where about 18 or so developers are a part of the newsroom. And that is, the physical architecture of where you put these people matters a lot. Most newsrooms, again, have reporters and editors in the middle of the newsroom occupying prime space, but they put the developers in a different floor, in a different corner. This might seem like not that big a deal, but it makes a huge different collaboration. It makes a huge difference in the outcomes that you do, because they are not part of the conversation. They're not part of the hierarchy. And they're not part of kind of visualizing what needs to be done. And those of you who think about kind of how physical newsrooms manifest, this is often a very overlooked thing, and I think it makes a huge difference.

Titles matter. I mean, Brian was the ASP.net developer. Try introducing an ASP.net developer to your best investigative journalist and expect them to take them seriously, right? So, most developers still are called front-end developer, back-end developer, Django developer. It's very hard to kind of expect people who measure themselves as editors and reporters and senior writers and columnists to kind of not really look at the title and say, "What has this got to do with what I'm trying to do?" So, I think a new vocabulary and a new, "What do we call them?" and "How do they fit into the journalistic titles?" I think is something important to think about. I don't have any answers, but it has inhibited being able to work together in newsrooms between journalists and developers, because just the titles are so weird.

The other thing is credit. You read so much about the Pulitzer Price winners, including last week. The underlying databases, the underlying presentation, the underlying experience is all done by a lot more people than the reporter and the editor who are acknowledged by newsrooms, while acknowledged by the Pulitzer Committee as getting prizes. At the Washington Post, we spent two years doing a project called "Top Secret America." And the night before it was running, there was a little box in the paper. It was a full spread as well. And they were running the names of the photographers and the reporter and the editor. And I said, "Well, what about all the people who've been working for two years to create this amazing online database, to create the graphics?" They said, "Oh, we never credit them, because that's not part of the norm of crediting people." There's a tagline under their graphic or under their database, but in print, it's not the case, even though the graphics that come out of that.

Putting their names as part of the project made a huge difference in how they perceived their contributions to this project. By "they," I mean, the developers. It's a small thing, but those of you who are editors, those of you responsible for kind of, again, giving titles and credit, [it] might be worth

remembering that these are not — back-end doesn't mean that they are behind the scenes. They've done now as much as the reporter or editor for this story. It's important to really credit them.

This is a really key part that most newsrooms tend to ignore even now. An example of this came up earlier when Ben Welsh talked about the St. Pete Beach real estate project database that was done by Matt Waite for St. Pete Times. He could find it. He read that it was in some archive. He probably searched for it. If you go there now, it's the worst possible experience, because nobody has maintained this database in years. The reporter has moved on. The editor has moved on. The developer has moved on. But unfortunately, these amazing packages that you've spent a lot of time [on] live forever on the web and the experience with that continues to deteriorate as nobody maintains it.

What typically happens in a newsroom is that the reporter tends to kind of think that that's the developer's problem and they move on, and the developer tends to think that, "Well, I have other projects to do. Why am I kind of focused on this when the reporter and the editors have all moved on to the next sexy thing?" I think it's really critical for us, for those of us who are spending [an] enormous amount of time on six-month projects and three-month projects to think about, so what happens at the end of this? Who's going to maintain it? Is there a shelf life? Are we going to put a note on it to tell readers that, "Dear Reader, the stories are all fine. This database is closed. It's no longer effective." Don't look at this as the experience you're going to get, because through search, through social, people are going to go to that page, and they're going to think, "God, this is a horrible thing. This doesn't work for me." And I think it's important for us to start thinking about that, because you want to either maintain the experience or limit the shelflife or think about some shelf-life and be very explicit that the experience is going to deteriorate, because code deteriorates, the data deteriorates, and the experience also deteriorates.

And this is especially important for this group. A lot of you teach journalism. A lot of you are trying to figure out, you know, what are the new things that are going to emerge. Where are your student going to get a job? And it's a huge challenge. About a year ago at some BBC thing, I said that I will never hire anybody who doesn't tweet or Facebook. And that became a big fuss thing saying, "How can that be a measure of hiring?" And my point there was that, I'm not saying you should tweet or you should be on Facebook, but if you don't know how to do that, to me that's the table stakes of being a journalist these days. I will not hire you, because then to me it feels like you are out of touch. I'm simply looking for an amazing writer, an amazing kind of industry expert, but to me these are kind of base skills. And how do we kind of pivot from teaching what used to be base skills to teaching some of the new skills?

Those of us—and I'm dating myself—who went to journalism schools here or elsewhere, professors always told you, you know, "Don't tell, show. You know, write amazing and descriptive. Show your readers what is happening, rather than just telling them. Then we moved on to show and tell, because you can do video, you can do photos. How do we then go from that? How do we pivot from that to kind of engaging your audience? What are we doing in journalism schools? What are we doing in internal newsroom training to kind of help our future journalists understand what engagement is? Are we teaching them analytics? Are we teaching them the metrics that you use to think of engagement? Are we teaching them journalism that will enhance loyalty to your journalism or to your brand?

These are all issues, I think, worth thinking about as we create curriculum. Because the good writing, good tools, good social media is all great, but how do you then take all that and make it an engaging, compelling experience that will bring readers back to your content? I think it's worth thinking about.

And as I said at the top of my presentation, a lot of questions here. I don't necessarily have all the answers, but if I'm looking to hire somebody, these are some of the things I'm looking at when I talk to people about hiring them. Do they have an understanding of what their journalism will be represented as no matter what the platform is?

I'll give you a couple of examples. And these are not the greatest examples of creating an experience, but just to give you an idea. One of the things that we're doing at the Journal is this idea of streams—that people can consume content in a stream, which includes blog posts, video, [and] audio. And rather than think of ourselves as the second screen or the third screen for a live event like the Oscars, can we be second, third, and fourth, and fifth screen? And if this works, we can actually go to a live example, right?

And so this was just...[adjust what's showing on the screen]. And this was just an example of consuming Oscars live on a website in a stream. All right? The idea was that you got on, you have tweets, you have articles in there, you have blog posts, [and] you have photos. And so the idea is that if you're watching Oscars, the original notion was that if there was a live blog, that was enough, because you're going to be watching Oscars, you're going to be on social, [and] you're going to be on multiple devices. And what we are trying to say is that, how can we give the experience in a single place? We are assuming you're watching TV. If you're not watching, this is a pretty amazing experience, because you can actually see photos. You can do live blogs. You can actually go see-if this works again-you can actually go see.... Well, never mind. You can see a video in the same stream, and it's a real moving stream. It keeps up with the fact that the Oscars is a - well, not necessarily fast moving, because it's three hours long, [laughter], but it is kind of moving along and you're keeping up. All this is happening in a single screen at WSJ.com. [Video ad starts playing accidentally. Video stops. Laughter.] I don't mean to.... I don't mean to kind of.... Sorry.

But again, trying to kind of say, put yourself in the shoes of kind of a user or an audience and say they're interested in their tweets about this, they're interested in tweeting back, [and] they're interested in kind of seeing what's happening in video or the photos. Can we give them a single stream? Can we give them a single experience? And I think this was kind of.... We just tried it out like for the first time. (I can go back to that. Yeah, the PowerPoint.) And then we said, "OK, this can be done for the screen even, but are there things that people want to just consume this way normally?"

So, there's a market stream. People are used to looking at what's happening in markets from [the] time markets open to markets close as a stream, because there's a ticker. There's stock activity. So, what we've done is, starting sometime tomorrow, there'll be a live streaming of your Wall Street Journal's coverage off the market all day. There will be stories. There will be kind of stock ticker things. There will be video. There will be blogging. And this is just all for somebody who wants to watch the markets as a stream, as a kind of live experience. They can just be on this page and get the highlights. And if they're interested in a particular item, they can click on it, and it takes you to the full experience of that, whether it's a video or whether it's an article, or whether it's sometimes just a tweet.

So, this can also be done for the stream. And the nice thing about this is it's also portable, in the sense that if you click on the stream on your mobile, the stream itself becomes a mini-app on your mobile. And you can just kind of follow the stream rather than having to go to WSJ.com. This fits in with this idea that readers want their journalism where they want it, so you don't need to force them to come back to our website. They can watch it as an app. So, I just last night clicked on the French election stream, because the elections are happening next weekend, and now I have a French election stream app on my [iPhone]. Just an instant app on my iPhone.

And not all experiences are fancy. We've discovered that a lot of readers of the Journal want to just kind of consume a stream of articles as just a bunch of headlines. So about a month ago, we introduced a little thing called Latest Headlines right under the main nav, and this is just a headline view. It's called a News Viewer. Surprisingly popular. People don't want any of the bells and whistles. There are a whole bunch of people who want just the headline experience. You give it to them, right? You don't want to argue with them. You don't say, "Oh, a big multimedia experience is the only way to consume it." For some people, this is the experience.

So, don't get me wrong when I say that, you know, experience includes all this. It sometimes includes a piece of it. It sometimes includes all of them. Sometimes it doesn't include any of them. But it is putting yourself in the prism of your reader, your audience, your user and saying, "How do they want to experience your journalism?"

So, our reality is that our readers are going to be promiscuous. They're going to be more and more promiscuous. The challenge for us is, as a newsroom, are we prepared to give them amazing experiences so that they keep coming back to you, your journalism, and your brand?

Thank you.

[Applause.]

Question and Answer Session:

Robert Quigley: Raju, one of the things I wanted to ask you about was, you say we have these promiscuous readers and we need to capture them and give them that great experience. That contrasts, in all due respect, to what Jim Moroney was saying yesterday [about] finding our intelligent readers and looking at smaller groups. Is that the nature of the Wall Street Journal versus the smaller Dallas Morning News or is it just a difference in philosophy?

Raju Narisetti: Capture is, I think, an unrealistic word these days. The Journal has a very different challenge, partly because much of our content is paid-for content. It's behind a paywall. So, you have to pay to access a lot of it. So, the question is, how do you get them—those who've paid, who've opted in and want to consume it—how do you give them a great experience? Because they have choices, right? They can.... Just because they have paid doesn't mean they will come back to us every day. And the unspoken kind of secret truth about most websites, most news websites, is that anywhere between 2 to 6% percent of our visitors consume between 40 and 50% of our page views. New York Times, Washington Post, the Journal, everybody has that. So, if you can get those people, those 2 to 6% of our visitors who consume nearly half to spend a little bit more time, consume one more page, you don't have to chase any other eyeballs, right? So, I think that's what I mean by saying you can't take your readers/users for granted. You have to create interesting experiences.

Take the Oscars, for example. Two years ago, the New York Times blew everybody out of the water with an amazing Oscar ballot that was available on Facebook. Just an amazing thing. I think Aron Pilhofer's team may have been part of it. Everybody then said, "OK, this really raises the stakes now. You can't just have a kind of static PDF ballot and say, 'Print it out and do it.'" So the next year, everybody kind of said, "OK, what do we do differently?" This year, our attempt was the L.A. Times and the New York Times are going to do some fun stuff. Can we do something very differently? The Oscars and the Wall Street Journal don't necessarily go together, right?

Robert Quigley: Right.

Raju Narisetti: But again, thinking about the experience and thinking about what else everybody is doing got us a significant amount of people spending more time on our site. And the Oscar part of it was free, by the way. It wasn't for our paid audience.

Robert Quigley: Good. One other question I had was, there's a lot of my students who are seniors. I'm going to ask this on their behalf. If they haven't gotten all of the experiences they need, as far as being that person that you're looking for when you're hiring, how do they catch up in a hurry? What are the exact skills that they should get, and how do they get there?

Raju Narisetti: So, most newsrooms are not doing a lot of hiring for conventional jobs. [laughter] All right. I mean, most newsrooms have - I think Ben responded when somebody said, "What's going to be the future?" [he said], "It's gonna be smaller. No guestion about it." But a lot of hiring is still going on. I mean, at the Washington Post, in my three years there, I was probably responsible for cutting 200 jobs. I was probably responsible for hiring 120 people at the same time. But all the skills that were being hired were for search and engagement editors. We're creating mobile editors, [and] creating kind of aggregation bloggers. So, it feels to me that those who have the multi-platform skills have the best chance of getting hired. I mean, I have two openings at the Wall Street Journal for like a corporate blogger and for a search and engagement editor right now that I'm looking for. Those are not traditional reporter/editor roles, but those are skills that require you to kind of take traditional reporting roles [and] on top of it add some specialty. I'm beginning to kind of learn and help the newsroom become better at the one thing that I want them to think of themselves, which is to get more people to consume more.

Robert Quigley: Very good. Question.

Man: I hate to draw attention to the one awkward moment where the video started playing an advertisement, but it's telling because that's a bad user experience. It's not unique to your site. I think anybody with a site would have the same problem. Where does the ad sales team sit in this configuration?

Raju Narisetti: So, I am of the opinion that free is very expensive. So, I don't believe.... Not because I'm at the Journal now. I said this at the Washington Post, and I've always believed that you have to pay for good content, because you have to support good journalism. The reason why a lot of newsrooms are doing more video, honestly, one is that there is clearly an indication that readers want to consume a lot of video, but two, you get the highest advertising rates, as you know. The CPMs, you know, the cost per thousand viewers is the highest in video. I just sat through like four focus groups in San Francisco and New York for the Journal video. And most people seem to acknowledge that we understand that if it's free, there is some price

we are paying for it. Most advertising agencies, their idea of innovation is being more and more intrusive.

So, part of my responsibility, and I clear all new advertising models or pitches that come, is to try to kind of say, "Is there a way to provide this experience without being intrusive?" It is very hard. A 7-to-15-second time span of watching a pre-roll advertising before a video is not so great. But part of our industry's problem is that, while everybody looks to newsrooms and editors and says, "These guys have failed and not caught up," our biggest failure—and I think Brian mentioned this earlier—our biggest failure has been our inability to create interesting advertising experiences. So, I personally think the golden age of digital advertising is yet to come, and that will be as engaging and as interesting as our content is, and we should continue to keep pushing for that.

So no, I mean, I admit to kind of it not being the great experience.

Man: Right. No, no. Would you put an ad person in the same room with a developer and the reporter, or do you need to preserve the wall?

Raju Narisetti: I put them [together] now, because the wall should be where it affects your journalistic abilities, right? The wall should not be where it affects your ability to make enough money to create and support the journalism. So, at the Wall Street Journal, the product tech news teams are part of like program groups that work together from the beginning to the end. It now includes the analytics folks. It now includes kind of the engagement, user-experience people, and that's the difference. But I don't see that as necessarily any conflict.

Man: OK. Thanks.

Robert Quigley: Thank you. We're going to take one more question.

Man: On average, how many minutes are readers staying in the page? And how many times do readers come back in the months [following] to the website?

Raju Narisetti: So, both those things are somewhat proprietary information. ComScore, which reports across sites, does put out a number every month, and it varies from site to site. [For] the top ten news sites in the U.S., it goes from as low as four minutes to as high as 50 minutes. FoxNews.com, for instance, has an average reported by ComScore in the 50-minute range. A lot of metro papers have in the four, five, six-minute range. At the Washington Post, that ComScore number over the last three years moved from 4 minutes to 16 minutes. So, they clearly now and we were back then doing something right to move the engagement.

The biggest issue is a lot of people focus on page views and unique visitors. The real number to focus on is visits per visitor and how many page views they are consuming per visit. That is really what engagement is. Those numbers again, [as] ComScore reports it, the range [is] from as low as a page-and-a-half if you come sideways to 4 to 6 to 8 pages if you come through the homepage, because that shows that you bookmarked the page or you're loyal to the brand.

The other measure that you hear a lot about is time spent, but time spent is a very weird measure, partly because it only starts if you click on something. If you leave the homepage open and just scroll down, there's no record of how much time you've spent on it, so it's not a great measure to focus on.

Robert Quigley: All right. That wraps it up. Thank you. Thank you, Raju.

[Applause.]