Day 1, April 19, 2013: Afternoon Session - 2:45-4:15 p.m.
Responsive Design and Other Trends in Digital Platforms Architecture and Design

Chair: Roger Black, Principal, **Roger Black Studio, Inc**, New York

Research Panelists:

- **Trei Brundrett,** Vice President Product and Technology, **Vox Media (SB Nation, The Verge & Polygon)**
- **Michael Donohoe,** Product Engineering Director, **Quartz,** Former Senior Product Engineer at **The New York Times**
- **Miranda Mulligan,** Executive Director, **Northwestern University Knight Lab,** Former Design Director for Digital at **The Boston Globe**
- **Travis Swicegood,** Director of Technology, **Texas Tribune**

Trei Brundrett: Hi. My name is Trei. I'm with a company called Vox Media. And since we're talking about responsive today, I thought, you know, this might be new to some folks. It's a relatively new technology and a design process and many other things. And I'll kind of share some of that. But what I wanted to kind of share with y'all today was, we have been kind of engaged in thinking about responsive, applying it, executing with it for almost a year-and-a-half now, which has given us an opportunity to learn a lot. And one of the things we try to do just generally with everything that we do is share as much of our learnings as possible, so this is an awesome opportunity to share that with you. So, it might be a little bit detailed. Hopefully, there are folks here who are potentially considering building responsive sites or your organization is or you're wondering what it is, what all the different kind of elements of that are. What I'm going to do is kind of walk you though a little bit. A tale of two responsive projects. We had two big ones last year.

So first, just real quick, some of y'all might not even know who Vox Media is. We are a digital, native, technology-driven media company. We've actually been around for about five years. We started as SB Nation, which is a sports media property. It's actually over 300 sports media properties. The Verge, which is a technology — it's actually kind of the vision of it is to explore technology, kind of the intersection of arts and science and culture. And then we just launched Polygon, which is a site about videogames. As you can see, we are organized around topics that people are very passionate about. We are very focused. There was a great quote earlier about focusing, you know, knowing everything about something, rather than a little bit about everything. And that's kind of our model is very focused that way.

Our company is organized. The motto of our company is to blend. You know, we have the opportunity of starting fresh. We don't have any legacy. And we got to kind of build a — not only design media properties, but actually design a media company. And our belief is that at the intersection of product, which includes technology and design, in editorial and advertising, that's where the magic happens. And that guides us. That culture is actually very important to everything that we do, including our responsive projects.

We had two big projects in 2012. These were very, very big projects. They were ambitious. I'll just tell y'all right now, we bit off more than we probably could chew, but we're crazy like that. We redesigned SB Nation and we launched Polygon in 2012. And I'm going to kind of walk you through both of thee projects, because they were both related to responsive, and hopefully there's lessons here that everybody can kind of take something away from.

So, I'm gong to start with the SB Nation redesign. Just to kick off, you know, our goals were…. I'm going to lay this out. This isn't specific to responsive, but it was part of the reason why we did go responsive. We had an incredible demand for our mobile web experience. We had launched a mobile-specific site. That traffic was growing incredibly. And, you know, we're on pace for it to be, you know, well over half of our traffic by the end of the year. So, we wanted to empower that, right? We wanted to really, you know, clearly…. One of our missions is to deliver our concept wherever our users are at, wherever that is, and however they want to get that. So, we wanted to really empower that demand. We wanted to embrace the increasing social and search traffic that we were getting. For passionate topics, you've got a lot of that happening on Twitter. I think sports is just massive on Twitter, especially around live events. And we got a lot of traffic around that. We wanted to optimize for that. And we wanted a visual design to match the quality of our writing.

And the other thing is, we are a network of over 300 sites. We had a lot of different individual brands. Each site is individually branded. And I'll kind of talk through that a little bit. This is the scope of our project. We have over 300 sites: 310 sites, 310 brands, 310 individual topics that we are covering on a daily basis, 310 editorial teams, active communities. This is really important because these are our most hard-core users who are on our site up to ten times a day. And that led to 310 kind of individual cultures. The way we think about that [is] community creates culture, and you had a different perspective on what their site was about. They have a lot of ownership over these sites. That leads to kind of the output of all of that is, you know, these big numbers—lots of editorial contributors, many, many community members, lots of comments, lots of content, and as you can see, you know, a lot of visitors with a lot of that being mobile web, including tablet there.

So, we went fully responsive. We had native apps. And we made the decision to take those out of the store. It was a radical decision. We had invested in those apps, but they were increasingly a resource drain for us. They were a distraction from everything else that we were focused on. We're not a big company. We didn't have a lot of resources to put. We had to focus. So, we took the natives apps out of the store.

We also were trying to solve for advertising. That's how we make our money. We wanted to deliver ads across of these platforms. And we had this idea that we should start with the article because of search and social traffic being kind of creating that as our front door to our sites. Our entries through articles was overtaking our homepage rapidly, and now it is definitely our number one source.

And then, you know, as I said about the branding, we wanted to do new logos. This is the ambitious part. We redesigned all of our logos. We even redesigned our technical architecture. And we were crazy enough to do this on all sites, all pages, all features of everything across SB Nation, and then we did it all at one time. I'm lucky to be here. We did that in six months. And when I [say] we did it in months, that's the amount of time that we had. And I'll talk about that, but, you know, in media, you have to launch when your advertisers bought your sponsorship launch date. Hard dates in technology products don't exist as much as they do in media, because you sell against those dates.

So, we've got a bunch of logos. These are just a sampling of them. We actually had a designer redesign all 300 logos. He did that in a record, I think, eight weeks. Incredible guy in the UK. I highly recommend him. His name is Frazier Davidson. And we redesigned our sites, and they were responsive. And I'm here before you today. But I want to talk about what we learned. Kitchen sink design sounds good. You're like, "Yeah, we should do this. We should do the logo. We should do all these things. We should do all of this. This is the opportunity and the designers and the technology, so like, yeah, yeah, this is good. We'll do this. We'll also do this. And if we're going to do this, we'll do this other thing." And then you have this massive project and it's hard.

The other thing, like I said, sponsored media launches are a tough reality in our business. We had a major packaged goods brand who had bought our launch, and so we had a hard date. There was no way to slip that date. And those are tough. We started with articles, but the problem was that it removed context. And we didn't have kind of this…. Not doing the homepage didn't give us a context for that design. It was kind of, it sounded cool, but that method was actually really tough. And we did a lot of training of all of our users about all these new tools, and responsive, and advertising, but it really wasn't enough. We didn't also give our users a sneak peak into the process and what we were doing. We didn't adequately give them a heads up.

And what we learned is that we had to be prepared to continually iterate after this, because we had done so much at once that there were definitely things that we [were] going to skip through. These are lessons that are not specific to responsive. They're just lessons that we learned. And I just want to bring them up because what we learned was, when you throw responsive into that mix, it makes it that much more difficult—exponentially, I think. Responsive plus redesign is time consuming, because if you're going to redesign every page while you make it, it's one thing just to make your site responsive, it's another thing to actually try to design at the same time. And I would say that doing that all at once is incredibly complicated.

The other thing is that [in] responsive advertising, we thought we were very clever. We came up with all of these solutions. The technology was awesome. The design was incredible. We thought we had this ground-breaking thing that we were going to push out, but it turns out that responsive ads is not a technology problem. It's not a design problem. It's a structural problem. It's an industry problem. So, you know, and we also learned in some communities, these browsers are—even if it's IE6 or IE8—these are active community members, and if you make it impossible for them to access the site, you take a lot away from everybody else. So, we had to learn to iterate.

So, Polygon was different. One site, one brand, one topic, one editorial team. Much easier. Fully responsive. We had no native app, so we weren't taking anything away. We got involved with the advertising products with the advertising team early. We had much broader browser support, including IE8, which was a tiny percentage of the audience, but it mattered. No new architecture. But we did do all pages, we did do all features, and we still had the hard date, six months, but it starts. It's better, it's easier to start fresh. Sponsored media launches are still a tough reality. And when you're going to do this article first thing, that fine, but provide a little bit of context. That really worked out well.

But here's a really important [point] I want to make. A thing about responsive is that we — there's this idea of designing in the browser. But what we learned was we'd make decisions about our design and about our functionality in the browser. We could do work in design or Photoshop, but actually getting in the browser and making the decisions there was also a really helpful thing to do. And using real content while we did that, instead of kind of fake *Greeking,* was really important. And then finally, we gave users a sneak peak. We did a documentary behinds the scenes of who we made the website, and the users got to see the site beforehand. Turned out great.

So, what were the overall lessons? These are the things that I just wanted to talk about that I think are important to share is that many of our challenges weren't related to responsive design. It just magnified them. Like I said, it made it exponentially harder when we took on everything else. So, my advice is to kind of, you know, section those things out. Maybe just take on responsive. The other thing is that a responsive redesign is a very different

beast than a responsive launch. A new thing versus taking something that exists is a big deal.

And finally, responsive isn't just a design approach, it's an organizational one. It's not just about your design team. It's about the business. It's about editorial. It's all of [these]. It's advertising. It's development. All of those things are important in responsive.

And I know I've run out of time, but I just want to say, native apps do still matter. They can serve a purpose for hardcore users or for specific functionality. This shouldn't be a religious debate about native apps versus responsive. That's it.

[Applause.]

Roger Black: Great. Don't leave. Great. I'm just going to ask a quick follow-up on that one point, because you ditched your native app when you did the big responsive redesign. Did you bring the native app back?

Trei Brundrett: We did not.

Roger Black: Oh. [chuckles]

Trei Brundrett: We didn't bring the native app back. Here's what happened is that we ditched it. What we were blown away by though is how many people demanded it [and] how many people wanted it. And we had just a crazy outpouring of requests. And when we launched the Verge, we actually did launch a native app. And it was a different set. It was a different audience. We gave it different functionality. And it served a purpose of building the brand and serving kind of a technology audience. We did not bring it back for sports, because we didn't have those kind of same needs.

Roger Black: Good. Okay. I think that's kind of a big question in the design world [of] the mobile apps before the tablets. They were given real contention for the UI and the kind of ease of reading and all of the good things that we weren't getting on the web. And so, I think the public liked them, and said, "Hey, let's have these. That's much better than the crappy website." And then now, it's possible with good CSS to do almost anything you can do on a screen in the browser.

Trei Brundrett: Yeah, I think it's functionality. I think visual. There's some like feel. There's some snappiness sometimes that you can make a case [for]. That stuff is ironing itself out, but there's some functionality that is — I think [it] makes sense in certain spots. If you're going to add something above and beyond just being a content leader….

Roger Black: A real app.

Trei Brundrett: If you're going to actually have true interaction and functionality around other pieces, I think there's opportunity there. Even that is losing its advantages there.

Roger Black: Interesting. All right. We may talk more about that. Thank you, Trei.

[Applause.]

Michael Donohoe: Good evening or afternoon. So, first of all, I just want to make sure that this is working. The marketing firm will be kind of upset that I didn't actually use our standard stock slideshow. I just decided to do one of the white panels. But I'm here to talk about our experience with, let's say, native advertising. One of the things that we did when we were envisioning Quartz and what it would look like in the three months it took to build it was actually rethinking advertising in terms of how it would affect us. We were at a…. We had an opportunity without any kind of legacy code, no legacy CMS, no technical data, to actually rethink a lot of things with our site. And one of the things we wanted to actually address was ads within the context of a responsive design. And it was quite a rollercoaster. We learned a lot. We made mistakes. We did certain things very well.

But in terms of responsive design, you know, the main priority for us was our content and how we actually can build something complementary to that. And it brought up a lot of interesting things. For example, you know, generally ads, even though they're meant to be secondary to what's on the page, usually end up dictating a lot in terms of the layout and the design. And even though you don't have the intention that your ads will actually drive the look and feel of your site, it's usually what happens. You have something that has very much a fixed position, fixed width, fixed height. It's solid within the page. And if you're going to try and be responsive in terms of like your approach to the site, reconciling that is actually very difficult.

And they kind of — I don't want to throw IAB under the bus, but it is the most well-known of most of the ad standards. And if you look at everything they have and all the other ones that we found, let's say, with Google and so forth, they are all pretty much fixed width, fixed height, and that's it. Now, there are a couple that actually talk about, you know, being able to be expanded by 20 pixels this way or that way, but for the most part, they are very rigid. And for us, that was a huge roadblock and something that we couldn't really get past, so we had to kind of like go it alone.

To kind of go back a little bit on how this kind of affected us, my main kind of media background is with the New York Times. And one of the banes of our development and design existence was the fixed position ads, specifically on the section front. So, the New York Times section front as it looks today is actually very smart how it was envisioned in 2005 and how it actually materialized in 2006 with the last redesign, where you have a fixed banner,

the middle ad in the C column, and they are all very, very specific. They are inflexible, and they drive a lot of the layout, and they actually drive a lot of the content. And even though the site has actually changed its overall width, I think it was like 800 pixels in 1996, and slowly went up, you see that they kind of fit like a very bad glove in some respects. And we wanted to do things that were different, different projects, interactives, before we're at the stage that we're at now. And it was always a restricting thing for us. It just didn't work out even with this ad. You can see like there's extra padding in the sides. And some people see that as like, you know, it's more of a portrait; others see that as wasted space. And that is actually how it looks as of last week. Not much has changed in seven years.

Now, responsive design is kind of a new concept, but it's been coined in 2010. It's been around a little bit longer than that. And yet still, here we are, it's an unsolved problem and will probably continue to be for quite a while. Let's see. If you go to IAB and you actually do a search on their site for responsive, you're not actually going to find anything. You'll just find articles that mention the word *responsive* but aren't even talking about responsive ads. And to be fair, that's actually just a failure of their search. There is actually stuff that I found, only through research for this presentation, on IAB trying to tackle responsive, but I'm not totally optimistic about what's going to happen there.

What we tried to do at Quartz was not actually even do responsive ads in the same way that we would do a responsive website. We wanted to do ads that were tolerant. That they would work within a range. That didn't have to be mobile tablet desktop solution. So, we decided we were going to something with flexible width and keep a fixed height. And I think that approach is solid. A fixed height might work for some people a bit better than it would work for us. So, we decided to create, let's say, on the desktop side, an ad that would work within a maximum width of 1100 pixels all the way down to 740 or 770 pixels—or sorry, 720—so that you could actually resize the browser window and the ad would actually work. It would actually be something that would, we felt, complement the overall layout of our articles. And, you know, this isn't perfect, but we feel it's definitely a step in the right direction. In theory, you could take that desktop ad and make it applicable to tablet.

Pushing it down to mobile kind of brings in other problems. There's a lot of media within the ad. There's a lot of JavaScript overhead. You are loading and doing things that could affect performance on hardware that isn't actually very powerful. Like the iPhone, you know, from when it first came out to where it is now is actually a very solid device, but it does suffer from flickering animations. If you go into Android, it's a bit more of a mess. You will have different performance in different browsers across different tablets, and it's very hard to benchmark. It's very difficult to actually nail it on one without possibly setting off something on the other. And that would just be a web development problem in itself.

But it actually allowed us a lot of—you know, when we were opening up this can of worms—allowed us to reinvestigate a lot of things in terms of ads. We didn't want to reinvent the wheel for the sake of it, but we also didn't want to just take the standard ad deployment process that was in place and just go with that and see how it worked. I personally am not very excited about ads just based on the history I've had with them. They were always something in the way. They were always something that you wanted to block. And I think that that's kind of been ignored. I think advertisers think very highly of their ads and everyone else is kind of like…. So, no one's really wanted to tackle the problem. I can't say I was too thrilled to even think about it, but at the same step, it's part of our business model and it has to be addressed, and we have to actually kind of look at it and say, "Can we make this better for the user? Can we make it better for the advertiser as well?" Which making it better for the advertiser is something else I could talk about for hours, so I'm going to skip that.

But as you can see, there were pros and cons to this. And I'm not going to read the slides, but certainly there are a lot of things that you need to consider when you are dealing with responsive ads, in terms of, you know, we're not just dealing with someone who's always on a corporate network with a fast Internet connection. When you're dealing with mobile, you have to be careful about what you can cram in there in terms of images and assets. We're also dealing with the fact that Flash is just a no-go if you really want to do responsive and actually cover anything that goes down to a tablet space. And then that kind of left a lot of other problems, like the HTML5 is a very popular umbrella term for a lot of technologies that people are excited about. And that kind of throws the door open to the various APIs that were usually open to an application like geolocation, offline. One thing, actually, just to jump right down to the bottom, one thing that I believe is promising but underexplored is WebGL, which is a kind of…. Well, if you're not familiar with the term, I will actually skip it, just because it can allow for a lot of really good, hardware level animation and interactions.

So, yeah, our takeaway basically was flexible width is better than height. You don't have to go too far. Most schemes for websites go with pagination in terms of scrolling upwards or downwards. Pagination right or left is good for presentations, but not so much for reading experience, where you're reflowing the content, the images, the text based on various window size. And so if you have a flexible width, that's more helpful than height. And again, none of the ads really kind of go with that. Even, let's say, if you look at the large skyscraper ads or things like that, they are usually vertical in nature. And that's where you probably, you know, where they suggest that it would probably be best to kind of expand up and down versus left and right.

And actually, I jumped right through this a lot quicker than I thought. I do have some homework assignments if anyone is interested. [laughter] These are some articles that were very helpful both in like pulling this together, but also in kind of our development efforts and discussion. I've kind of glossed

over some of the advertising issues, the agency issues, and getting like, if you go with standard ads, you get a lot of content in there immediately available. If you go the responsive route, you're going to look to have to repurpose things yourself, to redo templates, and hopefully get to reuse those.

As far as next steps go, I think this is going to be a stumbling block for a lot of people for a while. If you use Open X, for example, as your ad serving platform, you know, whenever they serve an ad, for example, they put it in a I-frame with a fixed width and a fixed height. Even if you want your…. So, you have to override that to say, oh, gee, the width should be 100%. It should take up what available space is there. So, there's hurdles, and I think there's conversations that still need to be had. Oh, and I intentionally made the Bitly links easier. If you know one, you can figure out what the rest are. And I highly encourage you to read up on that.

Thank you very much.

[Applause.]

Roger Black: Thank you. I just have one sort of comment/question. You said artisanal ads and then kind of glossed over that. In one of this morning's presentations, there was a slide that showed advertising revenue crossing and digital advertising, but the digital income or something was at the very bottom just flat. And my own view of advertising on the web for content sites, for news sites, has been [that] it's never been very good. Most of the companies that I've worked with that say, "Oh, we're breaking even on the web edition," well, that's because they didn't charge the newsroom to the website or something. My own belief is that the advertising scheme for the news web was horrible. And it created all these…. You had to break everything into pages and reload everything, and things were jumping up and down, and no wonder people didn't read anything. So, I think that this is an opportunity, if I understand what you're saying, [it is], let's make new deals with individual advertisers one at a time. We're not going to be able to throw out all the networks. We're not going to be able to reform the advertising agency world. They can't do it themselves. So, what I'm thinking is, what if we could just take…. Like, if everybody in this room would take on one advertiser and try to create a responsive play, whether it's content marketing or some way to the shopping cart, I don't know, but make a sponsorship deal that puts ads across platforms and makes some money. And just do one first. We could show everybody. What do you think?

Michael Donohoe: That's actually what we're trying to do. We've done with Boeing. We've done it with Ralph Lauren. The notion being that, well, I kind of said "artisanal" for a few different reasons. Number one, we take it in house. We get something creative that they have potentially used elsewhere, they have ready, and we are the ones who actually make it into those adverts. So, we take a kind of swipe gesture. We take a kind of like

playfulness. We don't let it flow over into the rest of the page or be like a full-on takeover ad. The other aspect as well that we wanted to keep the code in house is that in terms of, you know, we do like continuous preloading of articles as you go down. And if you're loading an ad at the right or at the wrong moment and it's very intensive, it's getting all these different light moves from who knows where, then you get a jittery effect in the scrolling. So, we were very sensitive to ads from that perspective. Like, not losing control of the code too much. Keeping it under our thumb for as long as possible. So, you know, I….

Roger Black: Code is working.

Michael Donohoe: It's working. We're looking to scale it. I think that's the issue. So far, we've been, you know, it was me and the contractors. And now, we're actually hiring in-house, a dedicated ads engineer who's brilliant. And actually, if you go to Quartz, **QZ.com** right now, you'll actually see a lot of his work and what's he's doing on the house ads.

Roger Black: Huh. If you think about it, the newspaper business, I guess I'm old enough to remember this, and some of you may not be, but we had something called pub-set ads. A great number of local ads were created by the newspapers. So, this isn't really like a revolutionary idea. It's just that now is the time. If we're going to find a revenue model for news, we're going to have to probably invent it ourselves.

Michael Donohoe: Probably. I mean, when you…. Not to harp too much on Mad Men, but when look at that era of advertising, those were kind of closer to art than what you would see in the paper today, for example. And I don't know that this is a harking back to those times, but certainly there's an opportunity for someone to really own the space if they wanted to. And so, we'll see.

Roger Black: All right. Far out.

Michael Donohue: Thank you very much.

Roger Black: That was great.

[Applause.]

Miranda Mulligan: [Steps onto a chair. Applause.] Wait. This isn't the paywall discussion. Damn it! [Steps down from chair.] Sorry. I bring this up only because we're still not paying attention to things that are going on outside of us — disruptive ideas. I bring this up because I've often been that person in a newsroom that regularly irritates upper management by talking about things like mobile. The fact that our content management systems are not that smart. They're too tightly coupled to the destination that they're going to. The platform that — the place where our content is going to go to. I

bring it up because I'm regularly the person that kind of irritates them; primarily, because I try to pay attention to ideas like Amanda Palmer's and her paywall idea.

Also, let me back up a little bit. Recently, I was telling a story about in 2008 I was working for the Virginian Pilot, and I was wandering around. And I was in my mid-20's and was one of the only people in the newsroom that worked on digital at all. And I just loved to just kind of find something that I thought was really, really interesting, and I wanted to share it with all the upper management. And at the time, there was a research paper that I'm sure somebody in the room is going to correct me and they're going to know who wrote this paper. I couldn't find it, because it was like six years ago. But there was a paper circulating about somebody had some research about lessons the publishing industry should be learning from the music industry. And I thought it was so fascinating. And I really wanted somebody to listen to it, because obviously we needed to pay attention to these smart phones, where our content was going to show up on our smart phones, and these tablets that started showing up. And it was such a divisive idea for the upper management that I largely was just kind of ignored.

And in 2010, I took the job at the Boston Globe as the Editorial Design Director. And a couple of weeks into taking the job, part of the reason I was interested in it was because the Virginian Pilot had a split brand strategy, where half of their digital content went into a local community portal website called **HamptonRoads.com**. The other half of their content went to PilotOnline.com. And that was the print content, so of course that was the valuable content. And so, there was this big like church and state divide between the content that went to HamptonRoads.com versus the content that went to PilotOnline.com. And the Boston Globe was about to embark on a split brand strategy, where they were going to pull their Globe content specifically out of Boston.com and make it premium content and create an experience just for the premium content. So, they were interested in me because I'd had a little bit experience with this kind of cultural thing, and I was a designer, a visual designer, and so I could actually create layouts and artifacts of discussions that we'd had.

So, I took this job and came in, and very quickly it became pretty obvious that what they needed is they needed a designer who not only understood editorial, but also understood the product needs. And so, they changed my job a couple months in, where I no longer reported up through just the newsroom. Now I reported up through the newsroom and product. And I did a co-reporting structure to the VP of Product Development and the Managing Editor in the newsroom. We embarked on…. We were given a challenge—find a way to make our content show up in all the places, which was a very weird thing for me to understand. And uniquely in Boston, there's really, really, really smart people in Boston. And in our backyard was a designer/developer who a couple of months earlier had written an article about this idea about the way that we should be designing the web. We should be making the web

so that it wasn't necessarily a destination specific. That it should be fluid and that the web was everywhere, so we should be designing the web so that it could be everywhere.

And so, he came in, he met with us, and he starts explaining to me what this web design technique [was], and my eyes crossed, and it didn't make any sense to me at all. And he basically opened and closed a browser for, as Josh Benton put it, the world's worst party trick, and was showing me kind of what this would mean. And it didn't make any sense at all. And so, you know, primarily because he's an incredibly wonderful person, we started to set up a really interesting team of people to develop some prototypes. We started designing some prototypes in December. And it's important to understand that the Globe project started and launched. We went into alpha in June and we launched in September. It started and launched in ten months. And the only reason we were able to do that is because it was a brand new product. It was not a redesign of a site that existed before that. It was a brand new thing. It had no legacy.

However, there were a couple of things that I wish — desperately, desperately wish — that I known before or that we had put into place before we got started on this. Number one, I really, really wish that we had taken some time to sit back and clearly articulate what our mobile content strategy is. Because one of the core things, one of the core reasons why we keep on talking about responsive design and you keep on hearing people say responsive design is because most people think that responsive design is a content strategy. It's not a content strategy. Responsive design is a way of making the web. It is one method for getting your content to be in all the places, but it is not necessarily a content strategy. And so, a content strategy, the reason it's there is that it's for the organizational structure. It's so that people understand how their jobs are going to change. It's so that people understand how the stories that they're writing and the photos that they're capturing or the videos that they're making [are going to be used.] Or, the marketing staff has to explain it. It's so that the sales people understand, what is the core reason why we're doing this? It's also so that the core development team understands what they need to do on the technical side to set things up so that it can support the way that we want the content to be handled. So, I really, really wish that we had taken some time to step back and really organize and set up an IA structure and a fully, clearly articulated to the entire staff, a strategy.

Now every time I bring up content strategy, managing editors and executive editors kind of give me a nasty look. I can always feel like these knives coming at me, because they think of themselves as the content strategist. And so, there's a very, very specific difference between what a managing editor is doing and an executive editor is doing when it comes to content strategy. A content strategist also is working very deeply with the technical team and making sure everything is supporting that. They're usually technical people. They are usually people that have…. The best ones that I've

ever met have a very, very significant background in editorial, also in visual design, as well as in information architecture. Because it's a very complicated role to be in. You're in this role that kind of helps you know every single point of the process and helps you set up the whole content workflow so that it can support each other.

And this also dovetails into another point. At the time in 2010 when I was working on this project, I thought responsive web design was going to be about layout. It's not about layout. The reason we think about the way that we design the web as — and specifically responsive design or mobile design being about a designer's problem, a layout problem, or a composition problem is because historically we moved over all of the ways that we talked about making the web in the context of the way that we understood designing and content for print. When we think about composition, when we think about typography, when we think about all of the pixel perfection and all that gorgeous, everything lines up gorgeously and stuff like that, these are all things that we inherited from years and centuries of history that we have in publishing to print. However, the web is everywhere. The web cannot be controlled. And this introduction of mobile has been the thing that has really exacerbated the fact that the reason why we're having such a hard time wrapping our heads around a new way of making the web is because we're having such a hard time with mobile.

Another thing, advertising is really, really hard. And we have really, really bad communication between us as the publishers and the designers and the people in the publishing house, between the advertising and the sales people, [and] even internally. Our sales departments rarely talk with anybody who's actually making the website. And our sales people don't understand all the confusion that happened in there. And then between that, then we deal with people who are delivering creative to us. And then once you have a responsive site and you no longer have control over the code that you're putting onto your site, it's just a mess. It's nasty. And advertising and that really poor relationship that we have with our advertising base business gets really significantly irritated once you introduce a responsive site.

Finally, this is the most important thing. Mobile is an idea. Mobile is not this...[holds up a cell phone]. Mobile is not this…[holds up a tablet]. Mobile is not this…[holds up a larger tablet]. Mobile is not my laptop just because it can move around. Mobile is not a specific size. Mobile can be gigantic. Mobile…[pointing to the overhead screen]. And it can be…. Mobile is this idea that we don't know where somebody is going to come at our content. We don't know how to control for that. So, we need to be designing and putting our content into our systems in a way that we don't know how they're going to be accessing it. Because time and time again, we are getting proven to us that our readers are going to decide how they are going to access our content, when they want to do it. It's not a time that's best to be publishing things. It's not a context in which we can design for use cases, which is good,

but we need to be thinking about how we can think about putting our content out there to be as fluid as the web is.

Thank you very much.

[Applause.]

Roger Black: I just have one follow-up.

Miranda Mulligan: Sure.

Roger Black: At the beginning, Miranda, you said that there was sort of a bifurcation about what was on **Boston.com** versus what was on **BostonGlobe.com**.

Miranda Mulligan: Mm-hmm.

Roger Black: So, how did that turn out in the end? What's going on now?

Miranda Mulligan: Well, I left the Globe about eight, nine months ago.

Roger Black: Right.

Miranda Mulligan: So, I'm not entirely in the know on what they're doing.

Roger Black: What they were doing as of eight, nine months ago.

Miranda Mulligan: At the time, we were going through some redesign processes for **Boston.com** to be going responsive, but **Boston.com**, in particular, has a lot of third-party relationships, so that means that's a lot of code that the Globe does not own, which makes it pretty complicated. And changing them…. You know, an anecdote that makes this make sense for me, when I was working at the Globe, Jeff Moriarty told me this story about how when he was working for **About.com** and they were redesigning the article pages, if they were to move certain links 10 pixels up or 10 pixels down, then that could have implications as much as 10 or 20 or $30,000 that they would make off of that article. The same idea carries over to removing these third-party relationships from **Boston.com**. So much money is tied up into those relationships, that removing them was really complicated. So….

Roger Black: But does Boston Globe content still appear on **Boston.com**?

Miranda Mulligan: Some Globe content, yes; not all. Breaking news mostly.

Roger Black: All right. Terrific.

Miranda Mulligan: Yeah.

[Applause.]

Travis Swicegood: So, I've been tasked with closing this out with, what's next for responsive? I want to start by saying that at this point I think responsive web design is table stakes at the game. If you're doing a Greenfield Media project and you're not responsive, I'm personally not going to take you serious and I don't think anybody else in this room should take you serious either. [some applause] Thank you.

It's not about the device. Responsive is not about being able to work on one of these, being able to work on a phone. It's about being able to meet the user where they're at. The device that your user are using today is not going to be the same device that they're on next year, two years, or five years from now. In a historical blink of the eye in our industry as a whole, it wasn't that long ago that your content was being delivered by somebody on a bicycle throwing it the doorstep of someone. The paper is dead at this point, and we've changed to a different device. That's going to continue to keep happening, and responsive is one way to future-proof that.

So, if responsive is ubiquitous, and you'll go with me on that and say that that's the way forward and that that's what we're trying to do, what do we do with responsive design? We take the word and we redefine the context of responsive. It's not just width. Width is the technical part of responsive web design. That was the thing that was coined in 2010. We figured out that if we adapted to the width of different devices, we could change the way that we displayed the content and create a different experience for every one of the devices that you're looking at. And if we go fluid, then we can sort of guarantee that we have some sort of good experience on any device that anybody is accessing.

But what if we were to take responsive and expand that meaning to include other parts of the user's experience? So, what time of day is it? Are they coming to the site in the morning? Are they coming to the site in the afternoon? Is it the evening? Are they on their lunch break? What if we had an evening edition and the site changed based on somebody — it was responsive to the fact that they were looking at your site at 5:00 in the evening?

What about if we responded to where you're at? For the Texas Tribune, we're Texas politics, so we're trying to — we don't really have the geolocation thing that somebody that's dealing with an entire state and multiple metros inside that does. But if you're covering the state of Texas, what if you presented a different experience to somebody who's coming to your site from Dallas versus somebody who's coming from Houston versus somebody who's coming from Austin? So, you could be responsive by looking at the context of where that user is coming from.

And the one that I think is the most interesting and the one that has the most potential from where I'm looking at is, what have your users seen? What have they interacted with on your site?

Current news sites follow three basic models. There's a little bit of fuzziness in this and they're not hard and fast, but they all fall into three things. One is the curated garden. You have the front page that you hit, and everything that you see there has been put there by an editor for you to use. The other is the reverse chronological. Sort of the blog style. The thing at the top is the most current and it goes backwards from there. Then there's a hybrid of both of those, where the top one or two stories will be something that's curated and says this is the most important thing right now from an editorial perspective, and then everything that fills in the page after that is the reverse chronological. Basically, the blog model of the rest of our content. One of the most popular sources for news for a lot of people on the Internet right now is Facebook, and they don't use that model. They use an algorithm to figure out what they think is most relevant to you. And I think that we as journalists and we as the technology people implementing these sites need to figure out how we're going to make that work. How we can figure out what is the most relevant to the user that's looking at our site right now.

So, what would that look like? One of the big things you would need to do is use metrics to figure out how people are interacting with your site. So, what are people reading? That's going to be a big thing. You want things that are popular, things that people are looking at. That's something you want to push forward. What are they sharing? What's going on in the social network, the broader ecosystem outside of your website? Your website only exists as part of the broader ecosystem of the web. So, how is your content being used and consumed outside of that? What are they talking about? Are people commenting on your particular posts? Is there a lot of activity on your site and those other sites out there that show that people are actually interested and engaged in that? So, you can take all of those and sort of create an abstract number to say, "OK, of the 20 things we've published today, this is the order of what we believe is the most popular based on how our users are interacting with it."

That gets a little scary when you start mentioning something like that to editorial, because they have some piece of content that's basically candy. It was an interesting story. They knew it was going to get a lot of page views. They knew they were going to get a lot of ad impressions if they ran it. But it's kind of useless. It's not something that you really want to be pushing and saying, "This was the most important thing that happened today," because it's basically just junk food. So, you need to build into a system that's calculating this scoring some editorial controls. You start with everything as sort of everything is equal, and then I want to say, "OK, this story here is something that is not interesting. This story here is something that's massively interesting. I don't care if nobody commented on it. This is the

thing that happened today that everyone that comes to our site needs to see."

And then most importantly, I think you need to take into account the user; the reader that's hitting your site and looking at the content. If somebody comes to your site in the evening at 5:00 for the first time, and they haven't seen any of the content for the entire day, and the most important story that you ran all day was published at 6:00 a.m., they're going to be lucky if they find it. On the Texas Tribune on a busy news day, that might not even be on the front page of stories by the time they get to the site, but that might be the thing that they absolutely need to see. So, we need to take into account whether or not the user has seen it or not and respond to that reader as they come to the site.

A good friend of mine, Ben Brown, has been spending a lot of time thinking about this. And he has coined it "reader aware" design. Taking the reader as they are hitting your site and trying to adapt to what *they* need to see. And then you can build in all these other metrics and use that as a gauge to say, "This is something that's interesting, but I'm going to short-circuit that, because these are the things that are really interesting, but you came to the site earlier today and you saw it, so you don't need to see it again, but here's the things that have happened since that you need to see."

I think as we move to something that is more responsive to the user, we're going to create a better experience for the user as they're interacting with our site, and that's going to create more engaged users of our sites. People are going to keep coming back. That's going to increase traffic. That's going to increase the ability for us to have ad impressions and all those good things that we want that are going to make us sustainable and continue to bring money in the door so we can keep doing what we want to do.

But we need to address the user where they are. So, instead of being responsive on a technical sense, we need to be responsive on a personal sense. We need to be responsive to that user where they are and how they've interacted with us. So, I think as we look forward to what responsive design is, it's not going to be something that is the technical, "What break points do I have? And what devices do I have the best experience on?" It's going to be, "How do I respond to the user that's coming to my site? This particular user. Not the abstract use case of Alice and Bob, but this particular user. How do I get them the information that is most relevant to where they are right now?

So….

[Applause.]

Q&A Session:

Roger Black: Great. That was good. What's interesting here, just on going to the kind of production and technical side, [is] we're getting to the opportunity, and Trei talked a little bit about this, to have a publication, let's call it. It may not replace the website. It may not replace any particular app. It's not replacing the print newspaper in most cases. But you could have a publication that would work on a bunch of different devices. And the big issues that we have now. The nice thing about that is that maybe you are going to be able to control the support costs and all the iterations of trying to create different products for different platforms, which always drives everyone crazy and drives the users crazy. Because a reader, a user, you never can tell where they're going to be. The same person can be reading one of these [holds up his cell phone] or reading a tablet or reading on a big desktop screen. The time of day, the way Travis is talking about, also gets in there. Clearly, you don't necessarily put the same exact product on every single screen and the same all day, but how do you figure that out? I think we know how to do that on the web pretty well. We can with CSS skip subheads or decks that just have headlines for it to make the presentation faster, more mobile-like. But there's a great number of issues yet to iron out. And I think the advertising one becomes kind of key, because at the end of the day, unless we have a giant paywall, we're going to need every bit of revenue we can. So, that's my quick gloss of what we're talking about. Does anyone want to pitch in?

Travis Swicegood: I have a quick question. How many developers died while you were working on the Vox redesign?

[Laughter.]

Trei Brundrett: Nobody died.

Travis Swicegood: Nobody died? [laughs]

Trei Brundrett: It was a great victory.

Roger Black: How many are missing?

[Laughter.]

Trei Brundrett: I will say that a lot of whiskey was consumed.

Travis Swicegood: That's a normal Thursday, I thought. [laughs]

Trei Brundrett: Well, that's true too. We survived.

Roger Black: Yeah, what's interesting, as Trei was saying, the complication of implementing a responsive site is gothic. And that's why after the Boston

Globe, the first big paper to do it in this country, there was kind of a pause before anyone said, "Me, too." And we've seen some of the magazines do it. There are quite a few responsive sites. You have a database of this, don't you?

Miranda Mulligan: Well, I wouldn't say a database, but I would say that what's really interesting about hearing Clark Gilbert talk this morning about the fact that we still have a culture problem in our newsrooms….

Roger Black: No.

Miranda Mulligan: And that every time we try to change things and keep up, it makes me think of Karen McGrane, who is going around talking about the fact that the reason we're having such a hard time with switching to mobile is because we don't have content strategies for mobile. And so I love the way that she talks about like traditional publishers and news publishers, they're like — she uses the metaphor of calling us the canaries in the coal mine. So, I was listening to him talk this morning, and I'm thinking, and I'm getting frustrated, because I'm like, "Oh, my God! We're still talking about this!" And then I'm like, "Thank God! We're still talking about this!" [laughs] And I really feel frustrated that we're not the ones owning the conversation about this web design technique because it's pretty obvious, because it's so logical that this is going to be the way that we make the web moving forward, as a generic way to make the web, not as in it's better than other solutions. And so we should kind of be the people who are talking about it, because we feel it first and we feel it the most; in particular, around the fact that we have really poor relationships with advertising and we want to like the IAB on fire and ship them out to sea.

Roger Black: Why?

[Laughter.]

Michael Donohoe: I didn't quite say that.

Miranda Mulligan: I did. [laughs]

Roger Black: You said, "If you lean down in front of them, I'll push."

[Laughter.]

Miranda Mulligan: They're not helping, and they're supposed to help, and they're not, when it comes down to it.

Roger Black: Well, here's the deal on the IAB. And you did show a link of their responsive advertising effort, which is for them a fairly big move. It's still very much pinned to the thick sizes and the concepts of what advertising

is on the web. And if you talk to most ad sales people or agencies, that's all they want. They want to sell banners even if nobody looks at them.

Michael Donohoe: I would also say that in the efforts that I've seen on the papers that they've written on responsive ads, that they're trying to say — and this would work from desktop all the way down to mobile — this will account for that this impression is from this impression and it will cost this much. And I kind of think that they're trying to bite off the old singing and dancing solution and one goal. That is one concern. As opposed to a flexible that will work in two different places.

Miranda Mulligan: The display ad problem comes down to the fact that it comes from print. We carried this over from print. Display ads make sense in print. The Internet is everywhere. The print is a picture. Like, it can't. it doesn't make any sense to carry over that logic.

Michael Donohoe: Though, I do find it kind of ironic that in print you have the concept of the bleed, where this is what we're intending to print and there is a safe area. And it's kind of like this is what we want for that.

Miranda Mulligan: [laughs] Yes.

Trei Brundrett: You know, I get upset about IAB all day long and the fixed ad. [Michael pats him on the shoulder.] I know. And these fixed units

Miranda Mulligan: We have some whiskey.

Trei Brundrett: We will. But what I think it did for us who were making these sites and even the product teams, the editorial teams, is that it allowed us for a long time for us to think that it was just a thing that was over that we didn't have to take responsibility for. It was a gray box and a comp and a model. We let go of it. We didn't take responsibility for it for a long time. And now, we're kind of paying the price for not thinking about it. It was always like, "Oh, there's this thing." Like you said, like we don't like the ads or whatever and it was this thing we would stay away from. And now, I think what a lot of us are finding is that if we want to improve it, it's our responsibility to actually take it up. And if we want ads to be responsive, it's probably going to be the publishers who figure it out. If we want to improve CPMs and have a premium advertising business, it's going to be the publishers who are going to do it. IAB is supposed to support the publishers, but they are thinking about scale, because they also support the ad networks. And I don't think — I think that conflict is difficult, and I think that ultimately it's going to be publishers who are going to be in…. It's our business. It's not somebody else's business. These people aren't going to figure it out for us. We have to take responsibility for it. And I think, you know, that y'all are starting to bring it in-house. We have over eight people on an ad products team. That's all they do is take responsibility for how we do premium ad product development.

Roger Black: That's interesting. How many people do you have in the regular design department?
Trei Brundrett: Our team's total is 40 in the product team, so eight of them are ad product.

Roger Black: And how many of those are designers and how many developers?

Trei Brundrett: Two, three developers and five designers.

Roger Black: Oh, all right. So, what's interesting….

Trei Brundrett: Two of those are heavy backend developers, right?

Roger Black: My goal with working my clients is, how do we shift the load for people just coding or doing production to people doing content? And I think that's one of the great benefits of responsive design for news is that you can do that. Sporting news, which puts out between 700 and 1,500 pages, iPad-size pages, a day, there is no art department. There is no one doing layout. It's all just done by JavaScript. There are designers or art directors who are choosing pictures and doing some special layouts for different sections. We're trying to get them to do more information graphics. And there's a photo desk, of course. I mean, I can't tell you how many startup news sites think they can just call it in from Corpus or something and they're fine. And if you could take some of that energy from designing all of these different products, make one product that goes everywhere, then you can spend more time on content.

Trei Brundrett: You can spend more time on ads. I mean, I honestly really think that advertising is a reality of our business. We should be spending…. We should think about designing ad products that are just as — you know, spend as much energy and thought in creating an ad experience that's just as good as the rest of our experience. It should be integrated and should be something that we take very seriously that way.

Miranda Mulligan: Absolutely agree with that statement.

Roger Black: So, Michael, when you make a deal — when Quartz makes a deal with Boeing, and then there is display, there's links to some kind of site that works or pages that work, right, that go off of that. And there's little sponsorship plugs in the running copy, right, or at least in the indexes.

Michael Donohoe: In the copy?

Roger Black: The list of headlines. What do you call that? The time table contents.

Michael Donohoe: Yeah. So on our site, on the left side, it's kind of like a large index of the current section you're in. We call that the queue. Those are links of sponsored content, which would be separate from, let's say, the responsive occasion and stuff I referenced in my talk. So, yeah, I mean….

Roger Black: But is that part of a package? Does someone get the whole thing or they buy whatever they want?

Michael Donohoe: They can buy whatever they want. I would defer more to the ad sales folks. They more of the nitty-gritty details.

Roger Black: Yeah.

Michael Donohoe: When it comes to me, it's usually like here are the concepts, here's the delivered end, and then they would have a very good idea of what they wanted. They are usually inspired by other things that they've seen. In some cases, actually, we've been trying…. I was told I couldn't do this. I actually wanted to pick, you know, companies and say, "Let's go and build ads for them and put them on our site," but apparently that's — we can't do that.

Roger Black: That's frowned on.

Michael Donohoe: Yeah.

Miranda Mulligan: That's what we did for the Globe. So, when we launched, we took these 300 x 250, the big ad space, we quarantined them into iFrames that we floated around the page, but we got one of our clients to allow us to — to work with us on building an app. We had to, because our ad server was really dumb. What we ended up doing is just building it directly into the templates at the site. It was the worst way to do this ever!

Michael Donohoe: I guess I want to do it actually without telling them.

Roger Black: What did the advertiser say? What was the advertiser response?

Miranda Mulligan: So, the advertiser response, it just wasn't as big and as flashy, because they're used to like lens flares and things that come flying out at you. Like, they're used to really bad user experiences. And one of our core value systems was putting the humans, the readers, the users first. And so even this responsive ad that we built for them, it was not — we were not going to go so far as to taking control away from the user. And they did not…. It wasn't a negative response, but it wasn't, "Oh, yes! We want to do this! Let's give you all the money!"

Trei Brundrett: We've been talking a lot about advertising. One thing I just want to talk about is, like, I think probably a lot of people here aren't doing

advertising. It's important to our business, but the other thing that I think is really important, [and] I didn't spend a whole lot of time talking about it on responsive, but what it has allowed us to do is really showcase our quality writing across all platforms wherever the user is. And so, we've been investing in long-form writing quite a bit. And what responsive has allowed us to do is to have that. We're not just investing in the writing, but we're investing in a really beautiful layout of those stories. And I think that the idea that you can get that everywhere is really important. And I think especially like for the Tribune, where you're doing this really great reporting and these data apps and things like that, the more that we can bring those wherever users are, not just in desktop, I think is really critical and why this is so big for us.

Roger Black: Yes.

Travis Swicegood: For an organization of our size, responsive is a way to get on every platform. Like, we could probably pull off an IOS app and have something that works really great on an iPad and kind of scales down to an iPhone or visa versa. And maybe we could make something, put something together that would work on Android, but we're not going to be able to devote the resources to it to make that a great experience, much less everything else. And then we're hoping that we're going to have a long enough shelf life of these devices that we're going to be able to recoup the expense that we put into that and not have to do it all over again in two years. So going responsive is definitely a way for us to say, "OK, we're going to have some experience everywhere. And we're going to focus on the ones that we *know* that we have." I mean, the second most popular operating system for our site right now is IOS. It's Windows, then IOS. We have more people accessing our site on iPads and iPhones than they are on Apples. And I see a bunch of glowing Apples as I look up here. There are more people using our site.

Roger Black: There's a PC.

Travis Swicegood: [chuckles] There are a couple of PCs out there. [laughs] But that was really surprising to me that we had that many more people using our site on their iPads and their iPhones.

Miranda Mulligan: But even getting into the IOS discussion, that's a dangerous place to go.

Travis Swicegood: Well, then we go into targeting a particular place.

Miranda Mulligan: I mean, what it comes down to is more…. I'm in the middle of a bunch of academics right now, so they're going to be like, "Cite yourself," and I'm not going to be able to do this right now, so I'll have to follow-up with you. But I was reading something recently in several reports

talking about more people having access to devices that have a mobile browser on it than have access to toilets and clean water. I mean, that's….

Michael Donohoe: I read that, too. I can back you up on that.

Miranda Mulligan: Thank you very much. [laughs] I mean, this is….

Trei Brundrett: Verified. Confirmed. Breaking.

Miranda Mulligan: This is like a thing, OK?

[Laughter.]

Miranda Mulligan: Let's not go down the IOS path too, too much.

Trei Brundrett: Retweeted.

Miranda Mulligan: Primarily because, yes, it's true, most of us in this first world country with first world problems, we, you know, have our IOS devices, and we can go down that path of really optimizing for things that that platform really allows us to do. But really what it comes down to is, mobile browsers are not going away, and finding and creating good experiences for people. We want to make our sites super-duper fast. And we want to make sure people can access our content on those devices.

Travis Swicegood: Well, the problem with looking at the analytics and saying that IOS is our second most popular operating system is that that's what it has been in the past. I don't know what it's going to be next. And I don't know what it's going to be two years from now. So, if I'm targeting that, I'm targeting something that's in the past. So, you don't want to make decisions about that. That's the thing that responsive gets you. If your strategy is going from, "I'm gong to make our web experience the best experience it can be and make it responsive so that it can render anywhere that there is a web browser," to "We're going to focus on IOS because that is our number two operating system," you're focusing on the users you had yesterday. It's that simple.

Roger Black: All right. Did you want to add something?

Michael Donohoe: I'm fine.

Roger Black: Go ahead.

Michael Donohoe: Well, I was just going to say, to support that, there is the other argument. Like, in the very beginning when we launch it, we had zero users in IE, so it's like, why even bother trying to help users in IE? Well, we don't use IE because it really, really sucked in IE. So, in addressing that, [it] actually bumped up, and I could see the reverse of that.

Travis Swicegood: Yeah.

Roger Black: Yeah. In one of the Treesaver implementations, we just got a complaint that it's degrading really bad on IE6. And it's like, it's amazing that it even grades at all to IE6. [chuckles] You know? "Can't you pep that up a little bit?"

Trei Brundrett: Yeah. I said this in my talk [and] you just dealt with this, but I just want to underline it. Like, on SB Nation, we didn't — we looked at the numbers, and we were like, "Oh, it's only 2%-3%." I can't remember what it was. And we really by not making it work for those browsers, we took away some really important voices in our communities. And they were stuck to those browsers because they work for the government or the military. They have no choice. They literally have no choice. And we took them away. We took them out of the community. And we degraded our experience for our users.

Roger Black: Then they turned JavaScript off too.

Trei Brundrett: Well, no, they just….

Roger Black: Some of them do.

Trei Brundrett: Yeah, they do, but it was just a crummy browser. So, I mean, it's just something. But this is why open web matters. I mean, you've got to — you can learn from it. And…I don't know.

Travis Swicegood: But, I mean, that's the important thing about responsive web design. If you're doing it and progressively enhancing and using semantic markup, you're going to degrade to something. Yeah, maybe it's not the best experience and it's not running the latest Chrome.

Roger Black: But it's there.

Travis Swicegood: And you've got the latest web kit installed and it looks beautiful and does exactly what you want, but it's going to degrade into something that people can use.

Roger Black: Which is not true in the app space. It's either/or.

Travis Swicegood: It doesn't exist.

Roger Black: It's either there or not.

Travis Swicegood: It doesn't exist in the app space and it doesn't exist in the adaptive space.

Roger Black: Another thing on that whole….

Miranda Mulligan: Well, a larger point to that, Roger, is the fact that if you share a URL with me, I may or not be able to open it in your native app.

Roger Black: Yeah, I was just going to say that. And why is that not mentioned more in this discussion?

Trei Brundrett: That's huge.

Travis Swicegood: I think it's a given.

Miranda Mulligan: Because we're not owning the discussion.

Roger Black: You can't even share app — you can't share links between apps, for instance.

Michael Donohoe: That's a whole new panel.

Travis Swicegood: I think it's another panel.

Miranda Mulligan: All right. Anybody want to have the panel in the hallway? We're ready to go do that. [laughs]

Roger Black: We're going to have questions.

Travis Swicegood: But is the bourbon in the hallway?

Trei Brundrett: With whiskey.

Roger Black: First question. Yeah, we're opening it up. We've got a few more minutes. So, let's keep going.

Jonathan Groves: OK, thank you. Jonathan Groves from Drury University. I just wanted to ask…. Great talk. Great discussion. And Travis, I was interested when you were talking about, don't think of being responsive to the device, be responsive to the user.

Travis Swicegood: Mm-hmm.

Jonathan Groves: And specific users. So, the question I have for you is, when you think about some of that, if things are already popular and people are already sharing, don't you want to get them to the content and highlight the things that they aren't seeing? And also, if you go the responsive feeds route, like you see on Facebook, what about the filter bubble problem, where they're only seeing what they want to hear and so on?

Travis Swicegood: The bubble problem, getting yourself inside a bubble is a horrible problem. One way you can do that is say, "I just want to turn it off." So, you don't want to say, "This is the only way to view this." I'm looking at ways to take the Texas Tribune down this route. And one thing we will most certainly have is the equivalent of slash-latest URL that is just the fire hose of the latest information. So if all you want is something you can basically leave loaded in your browser all day and hit refresh and see what's the most recent thing that's come up, you'll still have that ability. Like, we have users right now. Looking at the analytics that we have, the real-time analytics, that's the way people use our homepage. They load the homepage, and they refresh it, and they look at the top three stories, and they do that all day long, so that they can understand what's happening right now. And I don't want to take that away entirely. But I also don't want to completely handicap the user who's coming to the site once or twice a day, because we're producing so much content. I want to be able to promote the content that they need to see that's most important to them where they're at. So, it's trying to find a way to balance both of those.

Roger Black: In the early days of the web, most newspapers tried to do a Today's Paper section, because they feel very strongly about the way….

Miranda Mulligan: They asked me to do that in the Globe website.

Roger Black: But this is today's paper.

Miranda Mulligan: So, literally, there is a section in the Globe's website called Today's Paper. Swear to God.

Michael Donohoe: The Times has that too.

Miranda Mulligan: The Times does this too.

[Laughter.]

Roger Black: Well, the thing is that they….

Miranda Mulligan: We had to do it because of you, so you're the person I need to call.

Michael Donohoe: [shrugs]

Miranda Mulligan: We can hash this out later.

Roger Black: I worked at the New York Times a hundred years ago. One of the important things about today's paper in their view, and my view too, is that it is the hierarchy of news presentation and news judgment very carefully thought through by each desk and by a big front page meeting. And if you get to know the New York Times, there's a code. You know, what is an

off-lead or a strip-top or all these things that you hear in the news desk? Actually, if you are a long-time reader of the New York Times, and I've been a subscriber since [I was a] freshman in high school, and the thought is that you know what that means instinctively! It's a kind of information graphic.

Miranda Mulligan: The problem with that, though, Roger, is, okay, so, it's a Band-Aid.

Roger Black: I know, yeah.

Miranda Mulligan: You know, creating a section on our website that reflects [that] we happen to have another product that's in print, and we have this group of people who like that product in print, and they might come to the web; although, we don't have a ton of evidence that they do that, and creating a whole section that's got high-level navigation that allows you to get to this. And it's a Band-Aid, when actually quite a few machine learning techniques and smarter content management systems means that the system should know that based on the metadata that we associate to the content that we put in there.

Roger Black: But using….

Michael Donohoe: I just…. I'm sorry.

Roger Black: What you say? Go ahead.

Michael Donohoe: I just want to say, like, being a digital person, whatever, I do think that there is like this value in the artifact of like the front page and what it reflected in what was happening and the editorial decisions. I mean, even the Times had an ad that was there the other day that allowed you to put in your birthday and see what the front page was on your birthday. And it's fascinating to see kind of like what the relationships were between stories and what they thought was important or not important. And I don't know how we…. We lose a little bit of that.

Miranda Mulligan: I think that we can…. If we have smarter systems, then we can still have that person that informs the system, that same judgment that happens, and if we just want a picture of our print product, well, we still have a print product.

Roger Black: Let me respond to that. Hold on one second. It's not a question of putting the print product or the digital replica up. I just used that as an example, because there is that — what they like to say now is curation, the news judgment that goes into those things, that is often missing in the web. Because what happens is the most recent always seems to trump everything else and it keeps shoving things along. And you look at the homepage of the New York Times or the Boston Globe and it's really got a lot of stuff on it. And the thing is that, what I was saying to respond to what

Travis was talking about, what if you had some toggle switches that said, "Show me the latest news," or "Show me what I like, what I'm interested in, my tags," or "Show me what you think is interesting."

Michael Donohoe: I'm trying.

Roger Black: Because one of the things that the web has driven out pretty badly is that whole experience of swimming in the newspaper—the way you open a newspaper up and kind of flail around and have breakfast and look at different pages and really enjoy the thing and then, you know, go to work.

Miranda Mulligan: Roger, we made a lot of money on the print product in the 80's and 90's, too, but those days are kind of gone. Like, it's not really….

Michael Donohoe: Actually, what Roger was saying, there is one thing we haven't been able to replicate in, let's say, the iPad or web edition, that you can always go and find more content. So, if you start with Today's News, you'll always work you back. Get to the end of something, there's more. At least with the print edition, when you have it open in front of you, you pick and choose, you scan, you skip, you throw out the Sports Section—Trei, I'm very sorry—

Trei Brundrett: I'm done.

Michael Donohoe: — but at the end of the day, it's like just for the New York Times, for this particular day, I have read it. I have scanned what I felt was important. I followed through on what was interesting to me. And now, I am a…. I don't know whatever the feeling is. I'm sure there's some German words there.

Miranda Mulligan: Are there a ton of people that feel like that?

Travis Swicegood: With a lot of syllables.

Miranda Mulligan: Because I'm like I get the impression….

Michael Donohoe: There are quite a few people.

Miranda Mulligan: Do we have quantifiable data? There are researchers in this room. We could use a research report on this.

Michael Donohoe: They're my age, they're younger, and they're older.

Roger Black: Oh, yeah, we gotta go on.

Trei Brundrett: Let's take some more questions.

Roger Black: Another question. And we're going to have mud wrestling right after this.

[Some laughter.]

Mark Coddington: Mark Coddington here at the University of Texas. We've talked a lot about how to use responsive design to present content for people to consume in very accessible ways, in any way they want to. I'm wondering about how to use responsive design and how you guys have particularly designed — used responsive design to encourage participation. Interacting with websites and enabling people to create content on all kinds of platforms with one design. I imagine this is particularly relevant for Trei, since I know you talked about the SB Nation has what, 3 million comments a month? So, I'm wondering, what are kind of the principles or concerns or emphases that you guys have looked at in terms of getting people to participate and making it easy with your responsive design, both for things to look pretty and to make them really easy to use.

Trei Brundrett: So, we didn't do a good job when we launched. So, our community is in our comments. And we have a home-grown commenting system that's threaded. It's real time. It's got these keyboard shortcuts that allow you to see…. We also show you which comments are new to you and you can use the keyboard shortcuts to kind of quickly go through them. And it's a very addictive kind of place. And it's what has built — it's been kind of the core engine of our communities and why they've been successful. And we didn't do a good job at launch of kind of replicating that functionality. And in fact, that was one of the reasons why we built the native app, is we didn't think we'd be able to do a good job on the web with it.

Roger Black: Why?

Trei Brundrett: Because of just, you know, the real time is constantly updating. Like, how performance intensive is that? What are we doing to the battery? What's the interaction of like skipping down between things and animating to it? We had built it in the app, and it was hard enough in a native environment. But we spent a bunch of time and iterated and we felt like we got to a really good place with it. And so, it did take a lot of effort and it is responsive now, [motions width with his hands], that was responsive, [continues motioning], that's width goes this way. No, but it…. But it actually worked, and it took a lot of effort. And I think that you have to be willing to invest in that if you care about, you know, interactivity. We also have, you know, some other functionality—posting and things like that—that took some effort.

Roger Black: This is also back…. Your problem there was kind of the edition function. What's the end of the edition? Because you don't want to keep downloading on a mobile phone all the time or it does drain the battery. It

drives everyone nuts. But I think that obviously the expectation from our user is that I can comment, unless it's the Christian Science Monitor.

Trei Brundrett: They expected everything. They expected everything that they could get on desktop. And that's actually kind of the point of responsive. We realized, like, you know, they have really high expectations, which is great, by the way. I love users to have really high expectations for us. I feel really lucky that our users care enough to have to like complain and use our commenting system to complain about how our commenting system sucks. [laughter] It's a really awesome experience. And, you know, they do…. And by the way, the other cool part about open web is—and I've been tweeting about this recently—but they've been using all these grease monkey scripts to like kind of modify their commenting experience to make it tune to the colors of their team and all kinds of cool stuff like that. So, that's kind of a side benefit of, you know, not being native that way.

Roger Black: One thing, what I thought you were going to say was, "Well, you let the users do the layout." Well, you'll let them do the design. Not just skinning, but actually make it the way they want it. And that's an interesting thought. In the old days, before we started looking at responsive, a designer would think of the page. You were told, "OK, it's 900 pixels wide," or whatever it is, and you would do the page. And you would have [it] above the fold, which I still find hilarious in here, and you would design that, and you would be done. And then you would see it on some other monitor and it was completely ruined. And you're thinking, huh. There's this whole kind of what I call the *smock and beret* problem—the designers putting their canvas up on the easel, you know, and it's a particular size.

Travis Swicegood: So, here's a question for you, though, going down that route. Is that our job to do that, or is that the job of third-party apps? Like, we had this discussion last summer when we were trying to decide, do we go responsive or do we do a native app? Because we had had a native IOS app previously at the Tribune. It was a couple of years old, not that great, but we had one. You could go to the app store, search for Texas Tribune, you download it, and there, you've got the icon on your screen.

Roger Black: I've got it.

Travis Swicegood: But do we as the Texas Tribune or SB Nation or Boston Globe or **QZ.com**, should we try to create that experience or should we leave that to the third-party people? Like for me, the biggest argument for going responsive is, I want to be able to be on as many devices as I can. And if you want an amazing reading experience on iPad, go download Readability, go download Instapaper, go download Pocket, and put it in that and use an app where their core competency is building a reading experience.

Roger Black: And then they'll support it. Ha-ha! When they read the OS. I think, depending on scale, I mean, the New York Times has 120 developers

in house. Most of us don't. And I think that it's a question of scale. If you can find ready-built templates….

Miranda Mulligan: I think that's a question of value system—I'm sorry—not scale.

Roger Black: OK. Well, it's a question of scale for us.

[One person applauds.]

Man in Audience: Good girl.

Travis Swicegood: I don't know.

Miranda Mulligan: Did you have a question? I want to make sure we don't run out of time.

Patrick Howe: I do have a question. I'm Patrick Howe at Cal Poly University. Talking about responsive web design. My main information on that comes from Word Press, which seems to automatically put responsive web design in almost all of its themes. Can you apply…? I mean, I know you all are kind of beyond this, maybe, but can you kind of for the rest of us help us understand the role that Word Press can play in this?

Roger Black: It already is.

Miranda Mulligan: There's a lot of really great Word Press — responsive Word Press themes actually.

Travis Swicegood: And there's a lot of really good Tumblr things. Like just because you're using another platform….

Miranda Mulligan: I love Tumblr.

Travis Swicegood: Yeah.

Miranda Mulligan: Very, very much.

Travis Swicegood: The new nerd blog at the Texas Tribune, **Nerds.TexasTribune.org**, is a Tumblr blog, and their responsive theme was one we bought.

Miranda Mulligan: Word Press is great. There's lots of really great responsive sites, responsive themes out there, some great plug-ins that also work with those themes. I have a love/hate relationship with Word Press because it's built on PHP.

Travis Swicegood: I have a mostly hate relationship with it, but that's a whole other panel.

Miranda Mulligan: [laughs] Yes, that's another panel that we can take to the hallway. Because I actually think….

Roger Black: We're done? [laughs]

Miranda Mulligan: If Joey Marburger is in here, he loves Word Press. [laughs]

Travis Swicegood: Oh!

Roger Black: All right. Well, failing more time, I thank you very much. It was great having you.

Miranda Mulligan: I wanted to say one quick thing. Thank you so much for inviting us, Rosental.

Travis Swicegood: And letting us run over by 16 minutes. [laughs]

Miranda Mulligan: Yes, letting us run over. But then on top of that, like, thank you so much. We need a place to actually talk about these things, and thank you so much for making that happen.

Trei Brundrett: Yeah.

Roger Black: All right.

[Applause.]