
BOOK REVIEW

Wilkinson, J. S., Grant, A. R., and Fisher, D. (2008). *Principles of Convergent Journalism*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 240 pp. ISBN-13: 978-0195339246, paperback, \$39.95

Reviewed by Nancy McKenzie Dupont
Department of Journalism
University of Mississippi

The discussion of journalism convergence is a dangerous arena these days. Bring up the subject of changes in newsrooms and watch tempers flare, the blogosphere erupts, and academic convention programmers panic, trying to pinpoint what will be relevant a few months in the future. We're warned in graduate school about the perils of paradigm shifts, but after so many years of talking convergence, many in the academy are muttering under their breaths, "Enough already." The summer of 2008, with its huge downturns in the newspaper business and its upswing in the number of news delivery devices, proved that head-in-the-sand thinking can't last much longer, even for the most obdurate of journalism professors.

Now into the fray come Jeffrey S. Wilkinson, August E. Grant, and Douglas J. Fisher with the publication of their book *Principles of Convergent Journalism*. To the authors' eternal credit, there's no diffidence in their approach to the disputed landscape. They *attack* the philosophy, reasons, and realities of convergence in the first half of the book, giving professors and students much to consider at the beginning of any journalism course. The authors focus on the realities of what's actually happening, which has the effect of allowing students to see themselves as part of this new world without becoming bogged down in a professor's lament about "how things used to be." This is an important approach, because the authors accurately define news (both now and in the future) as an open conversation rather than the linear pronouncement it once was.

In the first six chapters, Wilkinson, Grant, and Fisher allow student and professor to understand how traditional media are moving to the Web effectively despite the many challenges. They correctly identify the question many traditional journalists ask: Now that I have multimedia options across platforms, how best do I use these tools to tell the story? They *attack* story organizing, feedback

procurement, platform maximization with authority, without giving the impression that anything is now set in stone. They sum it up in chapter three by admitting they don't know the answers because all is in flux. In the end, what matters is storytelling, a theme the authors effectively emphasize repeatedly.

The back story of convergence — the development of print, broadcast, and Internet — is not neglected, however. This information comprises the final chapters of the book. A traditional approach to the subject of convergence might have been to place these chapters at the beginning. In fact, some professors might be surprised the book wasn't organized that way. But the authors' creative layout is more powerful and engaging, and that in the end is the real strength of the book.

Sprinkled throughout are exercises that allow students to participate in this great movement of news from platform to platform with its dizzying array of multimedia choices for presentation. Students are put in the position of comparing story treatment in many technologies, from ink-on-paper to computers, cell phones, and iPods. They're asked early and often to use what they know to direct the flow of information. If news is a conversation, so is the classroom, and the active student, just like the active news consumer, will be the one who benefits. This book encourages and then allows that to happen.

The book's biggest benefactors, however, might be members of the academy. At its most basic level, *Principles of Convergent Journalism* is a handbook of what's possible for news presentation at this very moment. In calmer, more predictable times, that accomplishment might not be so lofty. Today, after so many confusing years in the convergence arena, knowing what's actually happening might be the most valuable tool professors have as we lead our students into this exciting yet unpredictable information age.

AUTHOR NOTE

Nancy McKenzie Dupont (PhD, Mass Communications, University of Southern Mississippi) is an associate professor in the Department of Journalism at the University of Mississippi. She teaches media writing and advanced broadcast reporting. For 17 years, she was an anchor, reporter, producer, and manager in markets from Phoenix, A.Z., to Charlotte, N.C. Her last job in the industry was as executive producer and acting news director at WDSU-TV in New Orleans.