Most TV/Newspapers Partners At Cross Promotion Stage

by Larry Dailey, Lori Demo and Mary Spillman

A survey of editors at U.S. daily papers shows that almost 30 percent have partnerships with television stations and those partnerships exist across circulation levels. Yet, few papers are committed to convergence.

In the spring of 2002, Diane H. McFarlin, president of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, wrote that “convergence is in all of our futures.”1 Journalism groups such as the Poynter Institute, the American Press Institute (API), and Ifra’s Newsplex continue to offer professional journalists seminars on how to practice convergence and to publish Web sites devoted to discussing how newsrooms are practicing convergence. And researchers continue to study how individual newspaper-television partnerships practice convergence, focusing in great part on a few high-profile partnerships.

Missing from the discussion is a systematic study of how convergence is practiced in the industry as a whole. How many newspapers across the country have television partnerships, the frequency with which the partnerships share resources and cooperate in their newsgathering activities and exactly which newsroom routines the partnerships are practicing in their cross-media partnerships? This study attempts to fill that void by offering the results of a nationwide survey of daily newspaper editors, which explores the state of newsroom convergence in the United States. The survey results provide a snapshot of the number of newspaper-television partnerships in the United States and the extent to which partnerships perform functions frequently associated with convergence. This research further suggests some strategies for continued study of television-newspaper news convergence.

Dailey is an assistant professor in the Donald W. Reynolds School of Journalism at the University of Nevada, Reno. Demo is an assistant professor and Spillman is an instructor in the College of Communication, Information and Media at Ball State University.
Literature Review

Although they have been studying convergence since the mid-1990s, scholars have yet to determine the extent to which it is practiced in the United States. One researcher has estimated there are 194 newspaper-television partnerships nationwide. An editor has reported 450. On their Web site listings of television-newspaper partnerships, API (the Convergence Tracker) reports 74 news convergence relationships, and the Poynter Institute (The Convergence Catalog) reports 62. However, both Web sites rely on news managers to be proactive in providing the information, leaving open the possibility that some news organizations have not reported their partnerships. The remaining literature on convergence has tended to fall into two broad areas—attempts to define convergence and case studies on how individual partnerships practice convergence.

The definition of newsroom convergence is evolving even as newsroom partnerships evolve. Much of the early literature appeared in the trade press. While defining convergence in loose terms, that literature has tended to focus on how newspapers or television stations could adopt the “Inspector Gadget” model in which a single journalist would report and file stories for multiple media. It also has emphasized the different types of technology that could be applied to the job. Most attempts to define convergence, however, have come from individual researchers attempting to construct a framework for their research or from professionals attempting to provide their colleagues with tips on how they can practice convergence in their newsrooms. Although most authors have agreed that convergence is some degree of interaction and cooperation among newspaper and television staffs, they have not delved into the specific activities that they would expect to be practiced by convergence partners.

Until recently, the scholarly literature did not define convergence in a manner that allows the categorization of specific cross-media behaviors or the determination of whether an organization is practicing the act. Gordon attempted to distinguish newsroom convergence from other, more technical forms of convergence when he wrote that newsroom convergence is one of five distinct types of convergence—ownership, tactical, structural, information-gathering and storytelling. Dailey, Demo and Spillman proposed the Convergence Continuum as a heuristic for studying practices in the newsroom. They define convergence as some degree of interaction and cooperation between newspaper and television news staffs at newsroom partnerships. Their Convergence Continuum posits that partnerships practice convergence at five stages—the 5Cs of convergence—that reflect an increasing degree of interaction and cooperation as partnerships move from left to right on the continuum. Those stages are cross promotion, cloning, coopetition, content sharing and full convergence. The continuum is a dynamic model that defines convergence as a series of behavior-based activities that illustrate the interaction and cooperation...
levels among staff members at newspapers, television stations and Web organizations that have news partnerships. The researchers further operationalize each step on the continuum by outlining the behaviors partners would be expected to practice at that level, such as cross-promotion of partners’ work or cooperation on certain newsgathering activities. Lowrey later modified the continuum to focus on three stages of convergence he called content partnering, procedural partnering (shared planning, scheduling and story preparation) and structural partnering (new structures for completing the job). Lowrey found that most partnerships focused on cross-promotion, while about half did some content sharing and few conducted any structural partnering.

Case Studies

The predominant research in convergence has involved case studies of specific partnerships. Both scholars and professionals have conducted case studies that use anecdotal evidence to explore the practices in newsrooms that have partnerships or to examine the attitudes of journalists working in those newsrooms. Many studies have sought to explain different phenomena at some newspaper-television partnerships considered pioneers, such as those in Phoenix, Tampa and Lawrence, Kan. In general, those studies have focused on how convergence efforts challenge existing norms and routines and journalists’ attitudes toward convergence.

Many researchers have found results similar to those of Garrison and Dupagne, who concluded that much of the convergence efforts at Media General’s NewsCenter in Tampa centered on cross-media promotion and content sharing, such as having a print journalist appear on the television station or a television reporter write a story for the newspapers. But those researchers and others have concluded that asking journalists to perform work for more than one platform places pressure on their time.

One challenge to cross-media partnerships is the melding of the cultures of two news operations that have operated under different routines for decades and that have a long history of competing against each other. The melding of newsroom cultures almost inevitably results in a collision of cultures. Silcock and Keith, who conducted in-depth interviews with 12 people working in converged environments and defined convergence as a framework of “cross pollution” between print, broadcast and online operations, observed that bringing the two cultures together can result in a “virtual Tower of Babel.” Similarly, after studying convergence in four newsrooms, Singer concluded, among other things, that cultural clashes “remain a major stumbling block.” Other writers have reported talking with an editor who recalled situations in which his supervisors “had to beat on my head because I’m accustomed to seeing other media as competitors,” and another editor who reported that he encouraged meetings between personnel from cooperating newspaper and television newsrooms so that each could see that their counterparts “don’t have horns and spiked tails.” The literature suggests the cultural conflicts might be
resolved through management techniques such as the identification and use of people who might most easily adapt to new strategies and the adoption of a planned process of organizational learning. Perhaps the melding challenges newsrooms face are best summed up by one group of researchers who found that “What works for one isn’t necessarily being used for the other.”

Research Questions

The literature indicates there is no agreement on how many cross-media partnerships are in operation in the United States, the extent of interaction and cooperation at those cross-media partnerships and the types of activities that the newsroom staff members perform as part of the convergence partnership. This study fills that void by asking the following research questions:

RQ1:
How many daily newspapers in the United States have news partnerships with television stations?

RQ2:
Are convergence partnerships restricted to larger-circulation newspapers, which are more likely than smaller-circulation newspapers to be in markets that have television stations?
RQ3: To what extent do newspaper-television partnerships practice various behaviors associated with convergence?

RQ4: At what stage of the Convergence Continuum are partnerships operating?

Method

The survey for this study was based on the Convergence Continuum (see Figure 1) as a tool for studying cross-media partnerships and to collect data that could help professionals evaluate their relationships. The authors of the continuum operationalized it by indicating specific behaviors they expected partnerships to exhibit when operating at each of the continuum’s stages. Those behaviors would reflect a greater degree of interaction and cooperation as partnerships move from left to right on the continuum. For example, at the cross-promotion stage, partners would be expected to visually promote their partner by publishing or broadcasting its logo on a regular basis. At the coopetition stage, they would both cooperate and compete: They might share some stories but hold back others that they considered exclusives. At this stage, partners also would be expected to demonstrate some attitudes that indicated they were wary of their partners. Finally, at the full convergence stage, partners might have a common assignment desk that would assign stories based on the strengths of each medium. Based on the operationalization of the continuum, the authors of this study constructed a 39-question survey. In addition to some demographic questions, such as newspaper size and ownership, the questionnaire contained 24 questions that asked respondents to

If convergence is to become a norm in newsrooms, journalists will have to forgo routines that have worked for both television and newspaper journalists and replace them with routines that work for converged news operations.
indicate the frequency with which they and their partners perform behaviors assigned to the five stages of the continuum. Questions addressed such activities as promotion of a partner’s content; sharing of news budgets, stories and resources; appearance of the newspaper’s reporters on the partner’s newscasts; and cooperation on special projects. For example, the question, “A designated person from our staff appears on our partner’s newscast to promote stories in tomorrow’s newspaper,” was designed to reflect the cross-promotion stage of the continuum. The item, “We form teams of journalists from our newspaper and our partner’s station to report and produce specific stories,” was designed to reflect the true convergence stage. Editors marked the frequency of each behavior on a 7-point Likert scale that ranged from never to once a year, four times a year, once a month, once a week, almost every day and daily.

The questionnaire also contained five questions that were designed to measure the types of attitudes expected when partners are operating at the coopetition stage of the continuum. At that stage, partners both cooperate and compete. When they are competing, they can be expected to demonstrate attitudes of distrust toward their partner or feelings that the partner’s news values and work are lacking. Finally, the survey contained three questions designed to reflect exactly how the partners share information, news budgets and stories.

The study was conducted between June and September 2004. Following Dillman, the survey took a four-prong approach. After compiling a list of all of the top editors for each of the English-language, general-circulation daily newspapers listed in an Editor & Publisher database, researchers sent a letter by U.S. Postal Service to 1,452 editors telling them a survey was coming their way via e-mail. Using information available on the Internet, the researchers collected a list of e-mail addresses for the editors who received the letter. Two weeks after the mail letter was sent, editors received an e-mail that asked them to take a Web-based survey. People for whom an e-mail address could not be found or whose e-mail messages were returned as undeliverable, received a second mail letter that asked them to take the survey and directed them to the Web site. Two weeks later, editors who had not responded to the survey and for whom researchers had an e-mail address, were sent reminders via-e-mail messages. Finally, a month later all nonrespondents were sent a final Postal Service letter asking for their help with the survey and a paper copy of the survey. Editors could return the paper survey or complete the Web-based survey. Use of PINs on the Web survey and unidentifiable paper surveys ensured respondents’ anonymity. In all, 372 editors responded to the survey, a response rate of 25.6 percent. Although the response rate is low, it is based on a survey of the entire population of English-language, general-interest daily newspapers, not a sample. The absolute number of editors who responded—372—dwarfs the absolute numbers that have been reported in many recent convergence surveys that used sampling methods.
Results

Preliminary analysis of the survey results demonstrates that cross-media partnerships occur across circulation categories, but the convergence behaviors practiced vary greatly from partnership to partnership. The partnerships frequently perform many of the functions often considered to reflect convergence: cross-promotion of partners’ content, appearances by newspaper staff members on partners’ broadcasts and sharing of daily news budgets and some resources. For the most part, the partnerships seem to reflect more behaviors associated with the cross-promotion stage of the Convergence Continuum than any other. A few newspapers are relatively committed to their convergence efforts, while others either are still trying to define their efforts or have adopted partnerships in name only. The results further suggest that although there is evidence that the partners share some of their work, the competitive spirit between newspaper and television newsrooms remains strong. Finally, responses from editors who do not have partnerships reflect a skepticism that could suggest reasons that newspaper-television partnerships may not become the norm in the industry.

Who Has Partnerships

Of the 372 editors who responded to the survey, 108—29 percent—said they had a news partnership with a television station—a number that is as much as a third greater than the number of partnerships listed on the self-reporting convergence Web sites run by API and Poynter. However, the 108 is fewer than the 194 Lowrey reported in a survey conducted in late 2003 and early 2004. The reason for the difference is not clear, but could be a function of variations in survey language.

Two findings from the results buck conventional wisdom surrounding convergence partnerships. First, much has been written to suggest that conver-

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aTwo newspapers that reported having partnerships did not indicate their circulation size.
bPercent of all daily newspapers in the United States as of Sept. 30, 2003, as reported by Editor & Publisher Yearbook.
gence is more likely to happen when the newspaper and television station share common ownership. After all, some of the more high-profile convergence efforts have occurred in common-ownership arrangements such as Tampa, Chicago and Lawrence, Kan. But the results of this survey indicate ownership is not an overriding factor in determining the existence of a partnership. Of the respondents that do have a partnership, 13.2 percent have the same parent as their television partner.

Second, although some editors reported that their small markets do not have any potential television partners, partnerships are in place across circulation levels (see Table 1). As would be expected, larger-circulation newspapers are more likely than their smaller counterparts to have a partnership. Although newspapers with circulations exceeding 500,000 represent .8 percent of all daily newspapers in the country, they make up 2.8 percent of those reporting partnerships in this study. The percentage of 250,001 to 500,000-circulation newspapers reporting having a partnership is six times the percentage of those newspapers in the general population. On the other hand, the percentage of newspapers with less than 10,000 circulation that report having partnerships is much smaller than the population. Although comparisons between the current study and the population must be considered with caution, the results suggest that although newspapers with circulations greater than 25,000 might have more ready access to partnerships and be more likely to have partnerships, smaller newspapers also want to join the game.

Much has been written about the benefits of cross promotion in newspaper-television partnerships—a function found on the left end of the Convergence Continuum. This study confirms that a small group of newspapers appears to be relatively committed to promoting their stories on their partner’s broadcasts. Still most newspapers are not taking advantage of the cross-promotion opportunities, and they give little attention to promoting their partners’ content. The most likely way newspapers promote their partners is by running their logos in the news columns. Less than one-fourth—23.4 percent—of newspapers that have partnerships say their partner’s logo appears in their news columns more than once a week. The same percentage report that their partner’s logo never appears in their news columns. Answers to open-ended questions suggest one of the most likely places newspapers will run their partner’s logo is on the weather page, where the newspaper can take advantage of the audience recognition often afforded local broadcast meteorologists.

The study also found that more than one in four—26.9 percent—of responding newspapers that have partnerships designate one staff member to appear on their partner’s newscast at least once a week to promote stories in the next day’s newspaper. At the same time, however, almost two-thirds of respondents that have partnerships—63 percent—said they do not designate a staff member to do promotion. Instead of designating an on-air promotion person, newspapers are more likely to have a staff member who has expertise on a beat appear on their partner’s broadcast to explain a story. Although almost half—47.2 percent—of
newspapers that have partnerships report they never have a beat expert appear on their partner’s broadcast, almost three in ten—29.6 percent—say they do so at least once a month.

An overwhelming majority of responding newspapers—70.1 percent—do not spend time during their news meetings discussing how to promote their partner’s content. Still, 13 percent devote time to such activities at least once a week, reinforcing the idea that a small group of newspapers appears committed to the promotional opportunities offered by convergence partnerships. A similar pattern emerges when newspaper editors are asked if they encourage readers to view enterprise stories that are run by their partner, but not by themselves. While less than 10 percent of newspapers that have partnerships—8.4 percent—encourage readers to view those stories at least once a week, 65.7 percent never do.

Sharing Work and Resources

The traditional competitive spirit remains intact at newspaper-television partnerships, at least from newspapers’ point of view. Most editors indicate they are willing to share at least some of their planning budgets with their partner, but they appear to be leery about sharing too much. At the same time, editors report they are sharing some planning of special projects and the costs of those projects with their partners.

When editors who have partnerships were asked which of a series of statements best described how they share stories with their partners, their answers indicate they are protecting their turf. Some 16 percent of respondents never share stories, while 44.3 percent are selective in what they share, 17 percent share most stories but request that they run some stories before their partner runs them, 12.3 percent share most stories but hold back stories on which they have a competitive advantage over their partner, and 10.4 percent share all stories with their partner. Those results are supported by other findings in the study. Specifically:

- Newspapers are more likely to share partial lineups rather than a complete lineup of stories they are planning to run. While 27.1 percent of respondents that have partnerships said they share a complete lineup with their partner more than once a week, 42.4 percent said they share a partial lineup more than once a week. Similarly, while 22.6 percent say they never share a partial lineup of stories, 71 percent said they never share a complete lineup. One reason newspapers might be more likely to share partial lineups than complete lineups is the large number of stories in the average daily newspaper, which could make sharing a complete lineup impractical if not impossible.

- More than once a week, about one in three newspapers—29 percent—update their partner throughout the day on the progress of stories they are reporting. A similar number—36.4 percent—say they never update their partners.
• Newsrooms are likely to share video or photographs if one of the partners misses or chooses not to cover a story. About 21 percent of newspapers that have partnerships say they do so at least weekly, and almost three-quarters said they do so at least four times a year.

• Although half of newspapers that have partnerships said they and their partner never share physical resources, such as a newspaper photographer riding in the station’s helicopter, 18.8 percent say they do so at least once a month.

• More than half of respondents that have partnerships—51.4 percent—never share the cost of special projects or investigations with their partners, but 3.8 percent do so once a month and 16.2 percent do so at least four times a year.

Although the pattern of sharing varies, the benefits are not lost on some editors. As one editor wrote in an open-ended question:

_They plug our stories on their 11 p.m. and 6 p.m. newscasts, which gives us enormous free reach in a very competitive market. We share info on breaking news mostly so that neither of us misses a story._

Another editor summed up how sharing information can help a partnership:

_A partnership is built on trust earned over time. This partnership works well because we respect each other’s work and professionalism. We make up only 30 percent of their overall market yet they work with us each day to get our stories on the air and they call us with news tips almost daily._

In fact, the answers to a few questions do suggest some partnerships might be practicing convergence closer to the right side of the continuum. In this study, 12.2 percent of respondents that have partnerships reported they and their partner have a common assignment desk or editor to coordinate the story-planning process either every day or almost every day. Some 80 percent said they never use such a desk. Another 8.4 percent said a common manager or editor determines how to use the strengths of each medium to give the most meaningful story to the audience every day or almost every day, and 81.3 percent said they never use such a strategy. Those results suggest a few partnerships are dedicated to pushing convergence as far as they can, but others are still waiting in the wings.

_Why They Go It Alone_

Although this research is intended to examine the extent of newspaper-television partnerships and their behaviors, information collected from editors who have no partnerships offers some insight into whether partnerships will ever become an industry-wide phenomenon. Editors who reported not having partnerships were redirected to some demographic questions and an open-
ended question that asked them why they did not. Of the 264 editors who reported having no partnership, 95 cited lack of a local television station in a small market, an expected response that reflects a newspaper’s geography. Two other strong themes that emerged from the open-ended questions mirror earlier research that cited cultural biases as roadblocks that convergence efforts must navigate.

First was a feeling that television stations in the local market practice inferior journalism. Some editors reported they did not have a partnership because they considered the quality of the journalism on television stations in their markets to be poor. As one editor wrote:

> Our local TV stations have exceedingly weak ratings and equally weak news reports. We see little advantage to be associated with a weak product.

Wrote another editor: “The journalism practiced by the television stations in our market is too far below standards for us to have any interaction with them.”

Even when editors were less judgmental about their counterpart’s journalism, they suggested differences in news values. “The TV station tends to leave hard news issues pertaining to local coverage alone,” one editor wrote.

The second strong theme that emerged was a feeling that a partnership would prove to benefit the television partner more than the newspaper. That fear could partially reflect the differences in the sizes of news staffs at the two media. Newspapers generally have much larger staffs than do the television stations in their markets and those larger staffs allow newspapers to have beat reporters who specialize in covering certain topics such as city hall, the courts, education and business. Consider, for example, the sizes of the two media that operate a much-heralded convergence effort in Tampa. On a typical day WFLA has six to eight reporters working while the Tampa Tribune has as many as 125.30 Such discrepancies in staff size can leave newspapers with a competitive advantage they are not willing to compromise.

“We have yet to be convinced that a partnership with a TV station will deliver as much to us as it will to the TV station,” one editor wrote.

“The deals offered to us weigh too heavily in favor of the TV stations,” wrote another.

Still another wrote:

> Local news is our most valuable product. We don’t feel we should give it away unless we see a measurable return. The three TV stations that work this market are located in a larger town 70 miles away. They devote only a fraction of their resources and airtime to our town. I’m sure it would be nice for them to add our eyes and ears to their news gathering team but why should I give them what I practically have a monopoly on? They’ve never offered more than a few seconds of airtime in return. That’s not enough.
One editor summed up the reason for avoiding a partnership rather succinctly: “TV bad—newspaper good!”

Some responses hint at one ingredient necessary to keep a partnership going: a commitment to the process. Of the 264 editors who said they did not have a partnership, 27—10 percent—said they have had one in the past five years. In response to an open-ended question asking why the partnership ended, the most frequent response was lack of interest, generally on the part of the television station. Among the other reasons for ending the partnership were lack of benefit for the newspaper and increased workload for the newspaper staff. One editor blamed the different newsroom cultures and routines for the partnerships’ end: “TV station was too demanding of our news people at the busiest time of our night (10 p.m.).”

Discussion

This early analysis of the convergence newspaper study provides a snapshot of the state of newsroom convergence among U.S. daily newspapers and their television partners. It suggests most newspapers that have partnerships are practicing convergence at the cross-promotion stage of the Convergence Continuum. The results further suggest that at least some partnerships reflect behaviors associated with the coopetition, content-sharing or convergence stages of the continuum.

Journalists and researchers have disagreed on whether news operations that rely mostly on cross-promotion and budget-sharing activities are pushing the idea of convergence to its potential because cross-promotion requires little interaction and cooperation. Some people have suggested that true convergence, the right side of the continuum, happens when the partnerships reflect the most interaction and cooperation they can. At those stages of the continuum, cross-media news organizations would plan stories based on using the strengths of each medium, for example, the context of newspapers, the immediacy of television and the interactivity of the Web. That kind of planning requires a common assignment desk or editor to work across the media, and the creation of a common assignment desk would mean journalists would have to change their routines.

As Shoemaker has pointed out, newspaper and television newsrooms have developed routines that, though different, help them do their jobs in an efficient manner. If convergence is to become a norm in newsrooms, journalists will have to forgo routines that have worked for both television and newspaper journalists and replace them with routines that work for converged news operations. Only further study over time will uncover the extent to which newsrooms have changed their routines through convergence partnerships.

The results presented here have two limitations. First, further statistical, multivariate analysis is needed to test whether the Convergence Continuum is a valid model for studying convergence. Further analysis is especially impor-
tant on the five questions designed to measure attitudes newspaper staff members have toward their partners. Second, more research is needed to compare editors’ reports on how their partnerships operate to reports from television news directors and Web editors. The authors embarked on the second leg of research—television news directors in early 2005.

Despite their limitations, these preliminary results do provide some useful information for researchers and editors. First, researchers now have a benchmark of convergence behaviors against which to compare future research. Second, editors can better understand the frequency with which various convergence-associated activities are practiced. Third, the results serve as a reminder that convergence might not become an industry-wide practice because some editors are not inclined to cooperate with their competitors and because not all newspapers operate in markets large enough to support a local television station. Finally, the results suggest that, from the viewpoint of editors, almost a third of daily newspapers in the United States are dipping their toes into the convergence pool while a few are starting to wade into the deeper water.

Notes
11. Ibid, 15.
13. Garrison and Dupagne, 30; Huang et al., 17.
17. Silcock and Keith, 3.
26. The researchers identified the top editor as the editor, the executive editor or the managing editor.
27. For example, Huang’s (2003) 31 percent response rate represented 160 editors, Lowrey’s 43.3 percent response rate represented 303 newspapers Filak’s response rate of 62 percent for newspaper journalists represented 88 newspapers; and Zavoina and Reichert’s 34 percent response rate represented 39 newspapers.
29. The question in the current survey: “Does your newsroom have a partnership with a television station? For example, does your newsroom promote content, exchange budgets, or share stories with a television station.” It is not clear how Lowrey determined whether the media outlets he surveyed had partnerships.