

Managing Editor's Desk

Nelson Fabian, M.S.



From the World of Newspapers to the World of our *Journal*

When I was growing up, enterprising kids like me had the choice of being a paperboy for any of the three major Detroit daily newspapers. Not so today. Detroit now has only one print paper, and it is home delivered on only Thursdays, Fridays, and Sundays.

Denver had enjoyed two strong newspapers for over a century. Today it has only one.

Four owners of 33 daily newspapers in the U.S. have filed for bankruptcy protection in the last few months.

U.S. newspaper circulation numbers have been declining for years by around 2% per year. That percentage has been growing in the last couple of years and is now in the range of 4%–5%.

Magazine sales are also down.

What is happening?

What's happening is that the way in which people gather news and information is changing, and in some dramatic ways. The migration from the print medium to the electronic medium is as real as it is serious. And barring a major catastrophe that takes civilization back to the Stone Age, this change is not going to reverse.

Worldwide use of the Internet is now up to around 1.5 billion people. The average person spends between four and seven hours a day on the computer and one to two hours a day just managing e-mail.

Today, computer and cell phone screens serve quite literally as our windows on the world. More than that, they actually function as a passageway that takes us into the world just as they allow the world to come to us. Think about this and it almost begins to sound like a science fiction. We live in

We are witnessing an incredible change in the way our society accesses information and nothing indicates that there will be any turning back to the old ways.

front of our computers and then “reach” into them to communicate, gather information, or just monitor in real time what is going on in our world. Similarly, the world comes to us through our computer screens to tell us something, ask for a response, or even make us laugh.

Given the time that we spend in front of our computer and cell phone screens, it is not surprising that we're now using our windows on the world to get our news and ... do something with it. Thanks to the many tools that electronically organized information enables, we can blog, cut and paste, save, e-mail a news story to a colleague, or branch off into related articles to enhance our learning, and so forth. Even better, we can have the information we seek immediately. Indeed, news provided in this way opens up a whole new world.

With younger and more computer-literate generations flocking to their computer and cell phone screens and with many baby boomers converting to this new way of obtaining their daily news, it is also not surprising that the circulation numbers for print newspapers are declining as they are. We are witnessing an incredible change in the way our society accesses information and nothing indicates that there will be any turning back to the old ways.

Well ... if we're going to be honest, we have to acknowledge that newspapers are hardly the only “printed product” that continues to exist in this new era of electronic information. The journals that associations publish also stand tall as veritable print products. Could it be that the forces that have unraveled the newspaper industry also apply to our own hallowed *Journal*? If I'm being intellectually honest, I can't see how it could be otherwise.

In fact, a few short years ago, I turned many heads when I rather boldly stated that I envisioned a day when the *Journal* (or at least major parts of it) would evolve into an online product. As heads turned in my direction, I couldn't help noticing that most had frowns on them. After all, the *Journal* is 70 years old and constitutes NEHA's most respected if not hallowed tradition. Transforming the *Journal* into something other than the print periodical that it has been for so many decades even sounds a bit sacrilegious to me.

But then again, the *Rocky Mountain News*, Denver's oldest newspaper and Colorado's oldest business, is now nothing more than a dusty memory, a victim of the changing way

continued on page 61

Managing Editor's Desk

continued from page 62

in which information is organized, communicated, and distributed. Because the *Journal* is so central to who and what NEHA is, we can't allow the same fate to befall our core product.

I learned many years ago that it is much easier to ride change than to stop it. That lesson was brought home to me through an Indian parable that went something like this. "It is far easier to jump on a stampeding elephant than it is to stand in front of it hoping to stop it." So it is with change. No one is going to stop the migration to electronic information mediums. We can, however, jump on the elephant and hope to exert some influence on where it is leading us. And that is exactly what NEHA is doing as we adapt to the times and continue to try to understand better your learning styles and preferences (and those of the generations of NEHA members yet to come).

Slowly but steadily we are moving some of the *Journal* material into electronic form. This is especially the case for information that is timely and current. For example, we have moved

the department "EH Update" to our NEHA E-News. This way, we can keep you current on events as they happen instead of publishing something that is out-of-date or off the front page by the time you get your *Journal*.

We are also in the final stages of establishing a searchable archive of recent *Journal* articles in a new members-only section of our Web site. This resource will give you the ability (not available in the print medium) to download, file, and e-mail this material. Because of these changes, you will be able to do all of these things ... and of course, more. In the process, we hope to make what we publish even more valuable to you, the NEHA member.

In moving some of our material to electronic mediums, we are also taking a huge step in the direction of making NEHA a greener organization. The more information that we can convey electronically, the more paper, ink, and transportation expense we can save.

Changing a product that has essentially stood the test of time is not an easy task. From the get-go, however, the *Journal* has been always and only an "instrument"

through which we have sought to serve you and the profession. The *Journal* is not an end in itself. It is, rather, the outcome of our commitment to keep you informed, educated, connected, and aware of the issues and people in environmental health. However the *Journal* evolves from here, rest assured that that larger commitment remains the heart of our focus.

In this era where new ways of delivering education keep springing up (blogs, podcasts, virtual seminars, wiki's, and so on) we see the *Journal* as an essential—but no longer the only or even the primary—means by which we can keep you informed, educated, and connected. As NEHA gets swept deeper and deeper into the electronic era, you will see an expanded array of devices (of which our *Journal* will be one) that we will be using to "get the word out" and to nurture this special community of which you are a member.

We get it.

We're on it! 

