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Tribune Interactive and Oxygen: A Failure of Identity

Rebecca Brown looked at the World Wide Web page displayed by the projector and frowned. Brown, the director of product development at Tribune Interactive, wasn't happy with what she saw on the Newsday Web site. Instead of using Tribune's corporate-wide content management system, Newsday Web producers had built the top of their site's front page by hand. The producers had typed in hypertext markup language (HTML) code to make their top news run across the width of the page's center. They split this top into two columns, enabling them to put more news items near the top of their front page. Brown stared at the page for a moment. "It looks like they're kind of taking advantage of the system," she said. By the look on her face, this was not a good thing.

The Web producers at Tribune's papers are not supposed to mess so much with Oxygen, Tribune Interactive's content management system. The system, designed to handle the content at dozens of Tribune Corporation newspaper, broadcast and other sites, is meant to be all encompassing. It manages text and multimedia elements, like photographs. It automatically takes content from Tribune print and broadcast providers, and prepares and presents it for the Internet. It is meant to be run by, not accompany, its human producers.

When, sitting in their Long Island, N.Y., offices, Newsday producers circumvented the system by such a great degree, they violated the rules of the system. Maybe they had improved upon the look at that moment, but they had slowed the workflow and spent a valuable resource – time and thus salary – on what Oxygen could have accomplished easily, albeit less prettily.

What cannot be forgotten in evaluating these systems is that the CMS always goes hand in hand with the people who run it. In this case, Oxygen cannot be evaluated without evaluating how Tribune Interactive has built the system and set the rules for it. This paper examines the people and the sites that have to follow these rules: local online journalists. This paper looks at Tribune's 11 English-speaking, local newspaper Web sites, how they use the Oxygen CMS, and their lack of leverage with the system affects their work. Working in what is truly a "new media," these journalists do not have the skills or the influence of their print counterparts. The balance of power at the networks of Tribune Interactive tilts mightily toward the corporate center.

Local producers' work appears to suffer greatly. While given the goal of creating an online identity for their papers, Oxygen's structure and rules limit news presentation and creativity. Too often, the system's templates dominate the unique content of the local papers. Also too often, it is obvious the sites are running with little-to-no supervision; the machine appears to have replaced producers at the smallest Tribune papers.

All in all, Tribune Interactive appears to use Oxygen to put financial goals over those journalistic. Saving time and resources, human and otherwise, is the priority. Doing good local new media journalism comes in second. The papers' online identities are subordinate to the corporation's bottom line.

Oxygen's use hurts "above-the-fold" content

Newspapers have traditionally viewed the top of half of their front pages as crucial, for journalistic and business reasons, but Oxygen deflates the tradition. The space "above the fold" (of the broadsheet-style paper) is typically what a potential reader sees first in a paper. If what is above the fold is uninteresting, a person will leave it on the newsstand or a subscriber will move

on to some other daily activity. Journalists lose because their work has failed to make a difference or impart information; business people lose because they have missed potential sales and advertising revenue. Their needs about “above the fold” quality are traditional and long held and have gained greater importance with the explosion of corporate media. Cable and digital cable are attracting people who once were loyal readers/consumers. This loss spells trouble for journalists and business people alike.

On the Internet, where media and content offerings are even more diverse and where “traditional” means little, quality above-the-fold content would seemingly be more necessary. Usability studies have shown that average readers are growing more comfortable with scrolling through long pages (a result of becoming at ease with the Internet at-large, according to Jakob Nielsen’s May 2, 1999, column). But sites still must work to convince readers to scroll, just like they must convince them to click on a link or do most other small tasks. With a computer, it is easy enough for a viewer to go somewhere else online or to perform an off-line task. The simple-but-severe nature of browsing challenges every Web site and every Web business to keep the viewers’ attentions. What is above the fold – what the viewer sees instantly on their screens – must grab their attentions, hold them and make the viewers want – need – to scroll. When the site is offering news, this pressure to develop need is intensified. Other sites, perhaps many other sites, may offer coverage of the same story. On the Web, content can be individual or collaborative, but news is always a business of competition.

Oxygen’s use by the Tribune then is strange. On all but one Tribune newspaper site, templates bind the entire front page, including all above-the-fold content. This approach keeps all content free of broken links and coding troubles and allows for easy updating, but there are downsides. First, producers may not exist, or producers’ time may not exist, to monitor the

quality of the top of the front page on a regular basis. If the machine can do the job adequately, producers can focus on other facets of their jobs. While productivity may increase, relying on the machine to control the space above the fold may decrease the quality of the product. Oxygen cannot automatically write tight headlines and blurbs to make the best use of the space, and it cannot add links to related stories or other “added-value” content.

Producers can certainly ride on top of the system, writing these tight headlines and blurbs, but real world evidence proves that they often do not. The author performed a survey of Tribune sites over several evenings. (The time of day was picked because it is often the time when news sites become more static, as the day slows and publishing of the next day’s paper has not yet begun. The most popular screen resolution, 800 pixels wide by 600 pixels high, was used to determine which content was above the fold. Popularity was determined by W3Schools.com Web site statistics.) The survey found loosely written headlines and blurbs that made inefficient use of the space available. On one evening, the Chicago Tribune’s site had three stories above the fold and no pictures; the Stamford Advocate had two stories above the fold and one small picture; and Newsday had only one story above the fold with a very large picture. The headline of the Stamford Advocate’s number one story ran onto five lines; it seemed to be a combination of the print edition’s headline and deck for the story. It appeared no one had noticed the mistake on the site’s most prominent story. The situation called for a producer’s hand, but instead the machine, apparently without supervision, ran with the mistake. The disjunction of the processes is stunning: While their print companions may agonize over their front pages, Tribune Interactive papers let Oxygen, a computer program, do its work.

In addition to page quality, the second major downside is the ability to handle a news story of overwhelming importance. Like a category five hurricane, they don’t come often, but

when they do, you had better be ready. The prime example of this type of story of course is the Sept. 11 attacks.

First level

- In this story, there were several top news events, all related: the crashes and building collapses in New York, the crash at the Pentagon and the crash in rural Pennsylvania.

Second level

- Coming off these events were other events that were subordinate, but these secondary events were still all related and still top news. The events included the evacuation of important government facilities, the whereabouts of President Bush and other closings and reaction events.

Third level

- On a tertiary level, all of these events demanded analysis. A scared public was looking for answers, and the news-givers had to begin carefully putting pieces of the situations together.

Fourth level

- Finally, the happenings created a glut of information and thus a challenge unique to Internet news. Because information is the essence of the Internet, people went online in need of finding the situation parsed and discussed in an easy-to-digest news product. This level included frequently asked questions, public message boards, informational graphics and fact boxes.

With coverage breaking into many levels, the news needed to be packaged. The news needed to be combined in an intelligent manner to form a cohesive product. If packaging is done effectively, viewers get a sense of the overall news situation but are still able to distinguish and use news items of greater or less importance.

While Oxygen can separate news elements by importance above the fold, the system lacks the ability to effectively combine the news by topic. That is, to create a coherent package on the front page. This fault is not a problem normally: Many important stories will each have a sidebar or two at most, and Oxygen has the ability to have related links appear below blurbs. But when the news suddenly becomes completely inter-related, as it did on Sept. 11, Oxygen has no way visually to attach these many large

items to each other. It is designed too simply to package the items. To show inter-relatedness to viewers, Tribune's front page Web producers have the option of related links but nothing more.

Third and most important of Oxygen's front-page flaws, the system is limited by its verticality. All of the content in the Oxygen system is vertical – ranked and listed. The vertical content includes lists of stories in the many collections, e.g. the front-page collection, the city stories collection, the local baseball team's collection. But while producers can determine the order of these stories, a single-file list can only prove so valuable. Two big news items may be of similar importance, or they may be so different that determining their rank would be silly or arbitrary. Also, a Web producer's news judgment, as good as it may be, will not satisfy all of the people all of the time. This judgment is especially up for grabs because the medium is the Internet, where the population and its interests are incredibly diverse.

Allowing for vertical *and* horizontal news placement gives more choice to viewers and producers. With the ability to place items at similar physical heights on the page, producers may rank items equally or may decide to leave part of the ranking to the viewer's mind. Opening up the site environment more, horizontal space gives producers a greater area in which to work and gives readers a greater chance to explore the available content. Allowing horizontal news placement literally gives the viewer another dimension, a helpful addition in a medium that thrives on dimensionality. In a business sense, the site and its producers have the opportunity to offer more content and advertising. Readers have an increased opportunity to take them up, and possibly to buy in, on their offers.

Tribune Interactive, however, seems intent to keep greater control over its papers' news products and to limit producers to simple lists. Oxygen technically allows papers to craft HTML

inserts for the tops of their pages, but Tribune Interactive appears to discourage it. The only Tribune paper to take advantage of this feature regularly is the Los Angeles Times. According to a former Latimes.com staff member, the Times demanded the Tribune allow them the HTML tops as a condition of accepting the Oxygen system. On its front page, the insert allows the site to put sometimes as many as seven or eight news items above the fold. Even during the overnight shifts, when the site is being changed to accommodate the next paper's news, the number of news items never drops below four. In the Latimes.com setup, the minimal above-the-fold look consists of one story with a large picture on the left-hand side and three stories with no pictures on the right-hand side. Producers create the space for this look by manipulating Tribune Interactive's current four-column design. The HTML topper uses the second and third columns while the Oxygen templates use only the second column for presenting top news.

Would it be difficult for Oxygen's makers to create a template based on the HTML insert? Not incredibly. Programmers would have to expand the story-ranking feature to accommodate left-right placement above the fold as well as up and down. Would it be difficult for Oxygen's producers to use such a template? Not at all. The ranking system as it presently exists is an insult to their intelligence and abilities as news producers. They learned about ordinal numbering in the first grade. As professionals, they are capable of handling far more difficult tasks and processes.

Oxygen as Tribune's tool for the automatic

By operating with little human supervision, Oxygen does what its Tribune creators designed it to accomplish: Be fast, be easy and be cheap. Tribune programmers worked with each paper to make its nightly feeds run smoothly into the system, and they created automatically indexing collections to capture and amass the appropriate stories. Tribune even changed

workflow on the print side too, drafting paper library staffs to attach keywords to stories, so the human workload on the online side would be reduced.

While automatic processes are helpful to producers, speeding workflow and eliminating their jobs' more tedious tasks, the automatic also takes control out of their hands. What the machine does, they can only hope to modify. In Oxygen's roll out, Tribune Interactive has wrested nearly complete site control from the producers, pushing their papers' Web journalists into smaller roles – story rankers, photo “attachers” and mistake fixers. These kinds of jobs have their unimportant work cut out for them.

In dealing with content from their own papers, Web producers must spend considerable time each day fixing headlines and blurbs on their sites, making this content appropriate for Internet use. While Oxygen may post a certain headline and blurb without question, the lines might make no sense to a human reader. This problem is the case especially in feature stories, which are often creatively headlined and written. Surveying the Tribune papers' sites, producers typically seem to be behind rather than ahead in fixing these mistakes every day.

Tribune's national and international news feeds cause other headaches. Used primarily by the company's medium- and smaller-sized papers, these feeds are managed and organized by a central news production team. Upon receiving the content, the local Web staffs may modify it but most likely will leave it untouched, especially on the weekends. The process leads to an odd mingling of national/international and local news. Although these news areas may have faint connections, like being of a human-interest nature for instance, they are completely different animals. A story about the latest accidents in town looks silly next to the latest about Zimbabwe's presidential election. Nevertheless, on a Saturday in February 2002, the Stamford Advocate's automatic site took the Tribune feed and put breaking news from Harare, Zimbabwe,

in the middle of not-so-breaking news from Stamford, Conn. Several other Tribune Web sites had the exact, same Zimbabwe news incongruously on their front pages as well – more victims of an unhelpful feed.

Oxygen's automatic processes have seemingly reduced Web producers into minor players at their own sites. The system could be an enabler for their online journalism, but by Tribune's design, the system drastically reduces their abilities to be a real, functioning "new media." Oxygen works fine for handling the boring grind of transferring daily editions online as well as managing breaking national and international news, but what does it do to help local Web journalism? The answer can be found by looking at the so-called "Special Sections" of the papers' sites. These "Special Sections" (the items are called by this and similar names) stretch the meaning of "special" and defy the meaning of "section." Many of the items are only a few stories grouped together with a few pictures. They share a primary subject, which justifies their grouping, but offer little in the way of value-added materials, like multimedia, databases, et cetera. Design-wise, they are restricted by Oxygen's strict requirements for template use. Some of these sections could have been built out into compelling projects by adding value and breaking out of the templates. Instead, they look and feel like everyday articles.

Meanwhile, Tribune paper sites have several, different special sections that have been forced to the side by Oxygen. These exiled packages include Greenwich Time's annual Business and Economic Review and South Florida Sun-Sentinel's Multicultural Directory. Built outside of Oxygen, the packages are free of templates, but they suffer from design and usability problems. Among other issues, the Business and Economic Review uses frames and shoves articles into too-small boxes. The Review could have used assistance from Tribune on the Web project, but Oxygen would have stripped it of its individuality. With Oxygen's all or nothing requirements,

the local papers are bound to lose with Web special projects. If they go with Oxygen, they are aided by the structure of the system and the Oxygen-supporting teams at Tribune Interactive, but they lose uniqueness and a chance for a compelling news product. If the local site producers go it on their own, they can create their product in their own fashion, but they likely do not have the skills the central Tribune staff has to offer.

The role of photos

Oxygen loses additional chances for compelling daily coverage by focusing on text primarily and making other elements, like multimedia and interactive items, secondary. Oxygen mistreats photographs and artwork, the graphical elements that essentially defined the Web in its break from the darkness of the Internet. Images made the Web different from everything that had come online before it; they are one of the Web's surviving primordial pieces. But as on many media Web sites today, Oxygen handles photos as special, extra items that supplement text-based news coverage. For each photograph, Oxygen allows producers to do little more than manipulate caption information.

This minimal approach diminishes photojournalism, an important story-telling medium and a crucial part of making and selling any newspaper. Photos can tell an entire story or complement a text article. Literally, they add local color to the news. The old saying holds true for newspaper editors as they lay out their pages, especially their front pages: A picture is worth 1,000 words. As a visual element, so different from plain blocks of text, photographs draw people into a printed page. As a way to tell a story, photographs can compete with the most well written articles. Why, then, does this print journalism tradition get short shrift online and at Tribune Interactive?

There are many technical considerations involved with storing photos in the system, but none force Tribune administrators to offer as few photo tools in Oxygen as they do. If photos were stored in the database, their collective weight (file sizes) would clog the system immediately. It makes sense for Tribune to store the photos separately. But as long as the photos were stored separately, what would stop the system from linking to more images, such as size variations of each picture? There is no need to build Adobe Photoshop-like sizing tools into Oxygen, but a free-standing copy of Photoshop could easily generate multiple sizes by using macros or Photoshop's own Action menu. A photo editor could run such a macro after cropping and touching up each photo. Also, just as articles within Oxygen can automatically link to each other, photos could be given the same type of linkage ability. Such an allowance would require producer oversight, but would make Tribune papers' photos part of the story-telling process. As photographs presently exist in Oxygen, they are merely isolated, supplementary elements.

Looking in from the outside, Tribune uses Oxygen to present photographs to the viewer as supplementary as well. On its sites, photos are typically small until the viewer clicks on them; then they appear in a pop-up window in larger form. While having the larger photo is helpful to the viewer, the process separates the photos from the text – even as both elements are telling the same story. This incongruity may seem to be a design decision and not Oxygen-related, but if Oxygen was more adept at handling photos, couldn't the Tribune designers find a way to mesh pictures and text? Their templates can be modified easily, but these templates are only as good as the database – the organization of raw materials – allows them to be.

There may be a business reason behind the pop-up photos as well. Struggling to obtain online advertisers, content providers are continually searching for new ways to capture viewers' eyes on their pages. As consumers increasingly ignore the standard banner ad, providers are

using different styles of ads, including the skyscraper, a vertical banner, and the square, a large, sometimes-interactive square. Tribune Interactive has adopted the square ad throughout its sites. Because of the above-average width of the square, designers must place the ad in the middle of their content. (By this requirement, the advertisers of course receive more attention.) In Tribune's rigid four-column design, the square ad can only fit into article spaces, which are typically the second and third columns. In order not to bump the ads, the templates move photographs inside the fourth column. This column limits the photos' width so as to make pictures uncomfortably small. Many times viewers need the pop-ups' bigger versions to fully comprehend the pictures.

The resulting look and feel is dysfunctional. Visually, the templates have joined the article to the advertisement. The photos are excluded, pushed to the far right side, a traditional spot for advertisers on many sites. Skyscraper ads are currently making their presence known in this area of many pages. The important question: By Tribune's choice of placement, is the corporation losing potential photo viewers? Studies have shown that Internet audiences learn to ignore standard online advertising (Nielsen, Sept. 1, 2001). If Tribune puts photos in a spot viewers have trained themselves to overlook, the viewers may certainly miss the images. Eye-tracking studies would be necessary to prove this theory completely. A previous Poynter Institute eye-tracking study for Web news found viewers look at news text before news photos. It would not be a stretch to conclude that the secondary element (news photos) would gain increased attention and viewing time if it were physically close to the primary element (news text).

Again, what does placement have to do with Oxygen? The answer again: The system's ability to handle the raw materials. As seen with the "above-the-fold" content, Tribune Interactive creates strict rules for Oxygen's content handling. In this case, the flaw is Tribune's

encouragement of system users to follow the four-column rule. The square ads pose a problem for the rule because they are too wide for the set columns. To work around the problem, sites must sacrifice the best placement of the photographs.

Although the workaround provides a temporary fix, what happens when another size or shape of ad comes along? In a constantly changing environment, workarounds are never ideal. It is obviously best to avoid needing them. But with Oxygen, Tribune ultimately forces workaround situations. Oxygen exercises wide-ranging, strict controls over the newspaper sites, but does not have the flexibility to adjust. Strictness and flexibility are not necessarily contrary. To be “strict” means to enforce rules stringently; it does not mean to be stubborn. In strictness, rules can change when the need arises. The rules simply must be followed both before and after a change. It follows that, in the tight but fluid nature of Internet work, rules work best when they are both strict and flexible. In the case of advertising, Tribune’s lack of flexibility hurts its ability to work under its own rules.

Failure to create community

In focusing on its policies for content handling and template manipulation, Tribune leaves out the spirit of its papers – the soul that establishes their identities and encourages community. Granted, spirit and soul are difficult concepts to instill in a content management system. A CMS is built to let a machine handle the cold calculations of site managing and to let human overseers manipulate the machine into producing online journalism. This motivation encounters problems, however, when the producers cannot keep up with the machine. On Tribune’s newspaper sites, which each creates hundreds of new pages each day, producers have no chance of exerting their human control completely. They may be able to modify some areas

of the sites, but some areas will always be left as the machine made them. Time constraints therefore must be overcome by the CMS. The spirit, the soul, the funk, must be faked.

This helpful fakery, this assistance by producers, can come by machine manipulation of microelements. These pieces of content, such as feedback options and event listings, are tiny but important. Users know news sites are good at the big things – users see the complex sites up and running every day – but the little works impress them as well. So the phrase goes: “It’s the little things that count.” With its intricate database structure, Oxygen has the capacity to handle the little things well, but Tribune does not make use of its potential. On a typical Tribune Web site story, the contact information for the writer appears at the story’s end, exactly as it does in the print edition. But while interested readers may follow through until the end of a printed story, they likely will not online. Studies show that few readers reach the bottom of long Web pages. Had Tribune Interactive made reader-paper interaction a priority, programmers could have easily trained the system to recognize these contact lines and move them to a box closer to the top of the story. At the very least, they could have programmed Oxygen to recognize and link the reporters’ e-mail addresses, which are often part of the contact line. Not only would such an action encourage interactivity, it would also save face. E-mail and Web addresses look silly online when they are typed but not linked. The practice of linking addresses is so universal that not linking makes a site look lazy.

Tribune could use Oxygen additionally to store and integrate its papers’ event listings. All of the Tribune sites have a calendar section and some organization of event listings, but often these listings are separate from the daily newspaper content. The calendar sections on two of the company’s biggest sites, Chicago Tribune’s award-winning Metromix and Latimes.com’s Calendar Live, are run on a different, older content management platform. As a result of the

segregation of content, events have little role in the main news sections and do not receive the level of priority they deserve. Although event content may not include the prose of a reporter, it is basic information that people want. Papers run television and movie listings every day and event listings before every weekend. This content may be of little value to journalists, but it is important to readers. The information assists their daily lives.

When this content is not integrated into the news product, viewers must search harder and longer to find information. If Oxygen could better handle event listings and other micro content, surfing experiences would be more pleasant on Tribune newspaper sites. Rather than dealing with dysfunction, viewers would feel more comfortable visiting and more comfortable with the paper's overall online identity. The business perspective is equally advantageous. Although advertisers would like viewers to stay on the sites longer, they will be adequately compensated when satisfied viewers return to the sites repeatedly.

Bright spots on the left coast

During the flaws of Tribune Interactive and its use of Oxygen, Tribune's Latimes.com shows promise within the system. As stated earlier in the paper, the site's hand-coded front-page top packs a good amount of stories and photo into the space above the fold. In stories that use photos, Latimes.com is the only Tribune site to keep them in the third column, pushing advertising to the fourth column. The site avoids sacrificing photo placement by using "square" ads only in articles that have no photos. This intelligent maneuvering makes the photos seem important and add to the story.

In the site's calendar section, producers carefully organize and feature event listings every day. While many of the other Tribune papers do not have the kind of resources to support such production, Calendar Live's templates fit the four-column structure and could be placed on

top of Oxygen. If Oxygen handled event listings, the system could assign priority within the templates or a producer could do the job quickly each morning.

Holding the bottom line

Latimes.com also produces many truly special features, utilizing Flash and HTML to provide compelling takes on stories, but these features come by virtue of the paper's considerable wealth compared to its corporate brethren. The Los Angeles Times is by far the biggest of the Tribune papers. How then are the other papers' sites supposed to measure up to Latimes.com and still hold the bottom line in the budget books? The answer is not simple and, as Internet and media stocks show, is not yet complete either. Tribune's current approach is to hit viewers over the head with ads, particularly pop-up windows and Flash animations appearing over and under the main browser window. Its executives cite these annoyances as the cost of giving away their product.

But is the answer really to let advertisers have the run of the site? On the print side of Tribune, editors would never let advertisers distract readers from the news. Print editors certainly would not let an ad with the content of the X10 Corp. appear with their front page. X10 has gained notoriety for its persistent and widespread "pop-under" advertising campaign. The content of their ads is equally notorious: selling digital video cameras for "surveillance" by showing pictures of scantily clad models. No printed newspaper would let its front page be associated with ads promoting sexual and possible illegal voyeurism. Newspapers often decline to print material on the grounds that they are "family" newspapers. Tribune Interactive and many other Internet content providers, however, do seem content with that association. After all, it pays the bills.

But there are other, less loathsome ways to keep the sites on and the water running. Sites could hire staff to produce content that people would pay to obtain. Most notably, the New York Times has begun a paid section, containing crossword puzzles and other premium content. Determining what people would pay for is a difficult task, but site executives should absolutely know these details ahead of time; the online industry is paying for too many mistakes already. The executives, however, have at their disposal the greatest information resource in their markets: the newspaper.

By its very nature, a newspaper and its staff are tuned in to information sources throughout their area, including databases, public records, and high-ranking personalities. If a company ever wanted to mine important resources in its geographical area, a newspaper company could do it best. Print and online sides need to work together to discover payment-worthy resources. The print side has the history and has already accomplished the legwork to find and tap the resources. The online side has the know-how and business motivation to convert the resources into a demanded Internet product.

This approach to revenue is favorable over any other approach that currently exists in the marketplace. The other top approaches are not proven to work financially on the Internet and have additional problems:

Whole-site subscriptions

- Forcing viewers to subscribe to an entire media site has not been successful. Microsoft's Slate magazine tried the approach several years ago and failed (Hu, 1999). Forced subscriptions also violate the advertiser-supported tradition of mainstream media (Cooper, 2001). Newspapers have always been available on newsstands and from newspaper hucksters for mere pocket change. Network television and radio have always been free to anyone who bought the end device. (Cable television only reached mass-marketability after its content grew to a critical mass.) Not only has this approach worked for business models, it also accommodates the masses, who may only want the medium sometimes, like in the event of a major news story. With a nearly free cost of entry, they can easily afford the medium whenever they need it.

Micropayments

- “Micropayment” models are still in their infancy and may not be possible in as vast a country as the United States (Nielsen, “The Case for Micropayments and “Readers’ Comments on Micropayments”). While Web usability expert Jakob Nielsen has promoted their use for several years, charging viewers pennies per page only works when the content in the system has reached an appropriate mass. They have to get past the basics of the system for the system to work. That is, they can only forget being “nickel and dimed” if they accumulate a significant amount of pages views and charges. With the diversity and the geographical distance involved in the U.S. “melting pot,” business people would find it difficult to gather enough important content providers to satisfy a large and diverse user base.

Conclusions

Oxygen takes the air out of Tribune’s local newspaper sites. Its rules, set by corporate Tribune officials, minimize the contribution of local newspaper staffs. While helping the Interactive division reach financial solvency, Oxygen turns local newspaper sites into organizers of automatic feeds. From the viewer’s perspective, the sites become more cookie-cutter like and less connected to the local communities they are supposed to serve. A supposedly “new media” becomes an online old media.

By centralizing the content management system and enforcing strict regulations of its use, Tribune Interactive has created a vicious circle for local online news. First, Tribune gives local sites no choice but to use Oxygen for all of their Web production. Bypassing Oxygen, either by using HTML inserts or creating separate content areas, brings frowns from Tribune. Tribune’s talented staff will not assist in creating such content. When the local sites must give up control to Oxygen, Tribune gets the leverage.

Then, by Oxygen’s rules, the staffs give up control of the workflow in addition to the appearance and design. The machine can do the work for them. Instead of being encouraged to

start additional work on the sites, the local producers find themselves in lesser roles, cleaning up after Oxygen's mistakes.

To try and find new roles, to try and provide new content, would cost money. Tribune Interactive has made its desire to spend very clear during the course of this class: "We're not hiring right now."

The machine, in all senses of the word, rolls on.

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Comments from Rebecca Brown were noted during a January 2002 field trip to Tribune Interactive's offices in Chicago, Ill. Comments from Tribune executives about advertising were noted at several meetings in January, February and March 2002.

Links to Tribune corporate and newspaper sites:

- **Tribune Corporation** - <http://www.tribune.com/>
- **Los Angeles Times** - <http://www.latimes.com/>
- **Chicago Tribune** - <http://www.chicagotribune.com/>
- **Newsday**, New York - <http://www.newsday.com/>
- **The Baltimore Sun** - <http://www.sunspot.net/>
- **South Florida Sun-Sentinel** - <http://www.sun-sentinel.com/>
- **Orlando Sentinel** - <http://www.orlandosentinel.com/>
- **The Hartford Courant** - <http://www.ctnow.com/>
- **The Morning Call**, Allentown, PA - <http://www.mcall.com/>
- **Daily Press**, Newport News, Va. - <http://www.dailypress.com/>
- **The Advocate**, Stamford Conn. - <http://www.stamfordadvocate.com/>
- **Greenwich Time**, Greenwich Conn. - <http://www.greenwichtime.com/>

The author encountered six pop-up ads while collecting these addresses.