

Journalism evolving, not dying: science author

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Journalists take their place at a press conference. Newspapers are dying but journalism is evolving, an acclaimed science writer told a gathering of the techno-hip at South By South West Interactive Festival on Friday.

Newspapers are dying but journalism is evolving, an acclaimed science writer told a gathering of the techno-hip at South By South West Interactive Festival on Friday.

Steven Johnson equated newspapers to old growth forests, saying that under the canopy of that aged ecosystem blogging, citizen journalism, Twittering and other Internet-age information sharing is taking root.

"I'm bullish on the future of news," Johnson said.

"I am not bullish on what is happening in the newspaper industry; it is

ugly and it is going to get uglier. Great journalists are going to lose their jobs and cities are going to lose their newspapers."

The shift was foreseeable but ignored, resulting in changes that should have happened gradually over a decade being crammed into a year or two with some pressure from the [global economic meltdown](#), according to Johnson.

"There is panic that newspapers are going to disappear as businesses," Johnson said.

"Then there is panic that crucial information is going to disappear along with them. We spend so much time figuring out how to keep the old model on life support that we don't figure out how to build the new one."

News organizations should stop wasting resources on information freely available online, he added. And, they should stop killing trees.

"The business model sure seems easier to support if the printing goes away," Johnson said. "They don't have the print costs."

International Data Group (IDG) has some 450 publications, many of them only available online.

The [global technology](#) media, events and research company learned the benefits of delivering its publications, such as PC World and InfoWorld, exclusively on the [internet](#), IDG chairman Patrick McGovern told AFP in a recent interview.

"The overall move to online has been big," McGovern said. "Print editions are yesterday's news. If it is news, [people](#) want to hear it as soon as they can."

IDG operates in 95 countries and says it is growing by double digits in China, India, and Eastern Europe.

Newspaper publishers would be wise to drop print and delivery costs and then focus on digging out the hot local topics that their readerships crave, according to McGovern.

"Find out the scandal in the mayor's office; what the police are up to, and those other things that people love to talk about," McGovern said. "It is easier and much less costly to put it online."

While internet users have grown accustomed to getting news, pictures, videos and other content for free, McGovern believes people will pay monthly subscriptions for online newspapers solidly tapped into their communities.

"I think people realize that if they are not paying for the information there will not be much investment in the information," McGovern said.

Johnson sees the future of news weaving together talents of professional journalists, bloggers, and people using social networking tools such as Facebook and Twitter to instantly tell what is happening around them.

The information mix will, of course, include direct online streams such as webcasts from high-profile people such as US President Barack Obama.

"Let's say it is impossible to separate fact finding from rumor mongering," Johnson hypothesized.

"If only there were some institution that had a reputation for integrity and a staff of trained journalists that had thousands of people visiting their websites every day."

Those institutions are newspapers, Johnson noted, adding that an Internet-age motto of newspapers should be "All the news that fit to link."

Johnson is co-founder of a series of websites, his latest being Outside.in, and his books include "Everything Bad is Good For You" and "The Invention of Air."

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