

tion area. This new weekly product should be twinned with the newspaper's free Web access, perhaps under a different, hipper name than *The Daily Bugle*. Young adults like the Web because it is virtually free and easy to navigate. Newspapers can use the weekly readership and Web site visits to sell the merits of the daily print publications. Some young people might grow into users of the Web, the weekly, and the daily. If not, two out of three ain't bad.

Newspapers can still do journalism. Washington Post executive editor Leonard Downie, Jr. and Associate Editor Robert Kaiser wrote a well-meaning book in 2002 about the deterioration

of journalism in the United States. "The News About the News: American Journalism in Peril" detailed the public's diminishing appetite for hard-hitting journalism. Other recent books have echoed the same theme that entertainment values are pushing journalism aside in many mainstream media. This is awful. Yet unless the most mainstream medium of them all—newspapers—can find a way to attract the young to their print and online sites, Pulitzer Prize-worthy journalism is going to go unnoticed and unheeded, and the mainstream press eventually will lack the resources to do good journalism because advertising support will have gone elsewhere.

There is not a bigger challenge for

the newspaper industry to confront in the early 21st century than winning over the young. Think Red. Think Web. ■

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Lessons Worth Learning About Young Readers

Young people will read newspapers and creative minds are figuring out how to reach them.

By Tom Curley

I really like something that the French editor Francois Dufour said about getting young people interested in the news. Dufour is pioneering the development of successful newspapers aimed at particular age groups, and he made an important observation about teenaged readers: "Sports and music news are very difficult to cover because the audience is split among many different passions. You can't say 'I'm doing a newspaper for teenagers.' You have to remember you're writing for a segmented audience."

That's excellent advice. It wasn't so long ago that most newspapers had "women's" sections, until it dawned on editors that the label stereotyped, patronized and risked alienating half their readership. We shouldn't have to learn that lesson all over again with young readers.

But having said that, there are some general things that can be said about the kind of news publications that will

draw readers of high school and college age. Again I turn to Dufour. I'm familiar with Dufour because at USA Today we made a careful study of what he was doing as we looked for ways to make our own publications more appealing to younger audiences. Here are some of his prescriptions that I consider right on target:

- Make it quick. Teenaged readers will give you 10 minutes if you're lucky, so your paper better offer fast-paced writing and easy layouts to navigate.
- Make it newsy. Of course sports and entertainment are important. But your target is young readers who might pick up a newspaper, and those are most likely to be readers who have a genuine interest in world news.
- Make it useful. Information that helps them succeed at school, in or out of class, will bring these readers back for more.

I have a fourth nugget of wisdom, gleaned from The Collegiate Readership Program that USA Today undertook in partnership with community newspapers and nearly 200 U.S. colleges and universities: Make it easily accessible and cheap. In fact, make it free, or nearly so. A small surcharge on tuition and fees subsidizes the program, and the papers are stacked near dormitories or wherever they're easy to pick up.

The results are encouraging. Newspaper readership on these campuses grows by multiples, and many students start reading more than one. An independent study shows that the newspaper habit leads to greater interest in public affairs, which in turn spurs further growth in newspaper reading. That might be a good reason to hope for the success of the free commuter tabloids that are now showing up in train and subway systems of U.S. and European cities. These publications might kick-

start reading habits where none existed and perhaps whet the appetite for more.

Another observation from the collegiate program is that male college students read more than their female classmates, mainly because of higher interest in sports news among young men. But Dufour's work with younger readers shows that school-age girls and boys are equally interested in newspapers. So there's a fifth recommendation: Start working on enticing women readers to

your paper while they're still in grade school.

There's plenty for the news business to cheer about in all this. Despite all you might have heard about the indifference of young people to news and public affairs, the facts show that they will read newspapers and that creative people in our industry are figuring out how to turn that basic fact into future subscriptions. Some of that important work is now under way at The Associated Press, and we will be

expanding the services and features we offer that will help our members attract young audiences. ■

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The Washington Post Reaches Out to Young Readers

'Put the journalism first, put the readers first, put the reporters first.

And start to move.'

In September Melissa Ludtke, editor of Nieman Reports, talked by phone with Steve Coll, managing editor of The Washington Post, about his experiences in trying to interest younger people in his newspaper's work. Excerpts from this interview follow.

Melissa Ludtke (editor, Nieman Reports): As managing editor of The Washington Post, what have you been most interested in learning about younger audiences and how their lives intersect or don't intersect with what newspapers do?

Steve Coll (managing editor, The Washington Post): The first and most important question is media use. And clearly, there are generations rising whose patterns of media use and information retrieval are really quite different from generations who have gone before them. And it's not just the young adults that the newspaper industry understandably concentrates on, but the generations coming immediately behind them, whose use of instant messaging and search technology is altering in profound ways their relationship with information and media. That younger generation is crucially important to newspapers in part be-

cause it is so large. It's larger than the baby boom generation.

And so, the first thing I struggle to understand is how these changing media use habits connect to the kind of journalism we produce, not just in the newspaper, but also on the Web. And then, as this generation ages, how can we capture them across all of our platforms while sustaining the business model that makes the journalism we do possible in the first place? It's not enough to just find an audience as all of the dot-com venture capital investors discovered. We have to find an audience from which we can sustain journalism that matters and that involves resources.

M.L.: Are there distinct fundamentally different challenges now?

Coll: Yes. And most of those involve the breakout of the Web as the ubiquitous medium. But I think it's important to see these challenges as a kind of synthesis, that is to say you have to conquer the new while you manage the inheritance in a successful and rational way. If you think about it in generational terms, it is a duty and a need of newspapers to serve the baby boom generation effectively until they

pass, and we know for a fact that the baby boom generation is going to read newspapers well into its 80's and do so loyally, and that's very important for the future of newspaper-based companies. And the generation that comes after them, the evidence suggests they are going to have a less deep and less loyal relationship with newspapers. But they're going to have some relationship as they age as well. So that platform and the journalism, and the newsroom culture, and the resources, and the organizational charts that serve it must continue even while you construct the transition. That's what makes it so interesting.

It's not a radical break. It's a really energetic and creative evolution that tries to hold both fronts together—the defensive and the offensive front—and really pull them together, so they're not fighting with each other but you are really just moving in the right pattern in both of these directions.

M.L.: Both directions at the same time. Is that physically possible?

Coll: This is a big advantage of the Web. In comparison to previous revolutions in media technology, the Web is much friendlier to newspapers than