

MEDIA CONVERGENCE: BUZZWORD OR REALITY?

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Introduction

Media industry is evolving! This is not new, if one thinks about the improvements between Gutenberg (15th century) work and up to date trade printing companies. This evolution was slow and mainly related to technology progress. It then became faster and faster: industrial revolution in the 19th century, transistor and computer science in the late 20th century and the communication and Internet social aspect nowadays, each gave its own acceleration boost in the whole process.

This has a lot of impact in our media field and business habits. The way to transmit messages and information is dramatically changing, and will continue to do so in the foreseen future.

This is a giant challenge that raises many questions in different sectors – press agencies, “traditional” publication (newspaper, magazine, television, radio, ...), companies and of course individuals – and on different levels – communications, technical, financial, organizational, ...

This challenge may be a source of worries for some actors, but also a seed for new ideas and opportunities to adapt usual processes, or better, invent new ones!

New professions will inevitably emerge and, as teaching institutions, we have to anticipate this as much as possible, investigates new ways of publications and mixing new and emerging technologies.

This paper addresses the issue faced by media companies in Switzerland.

Some definitions

Language is prone to misunderstanding and misinterpretations. In order to minimize these we propose the following small lexicon.

Term	Definition
Media producer	A company producing publications. Including also non-media companies. Examples: newspaper, television, radio, administrations, manufacturing, ...
Media	Analog or numeric data resulting of an input process: typing, recording sound or video, conversion, . Examples: pieces of paper, films, files (video, image, texte, webpage, pdf files, ...).
Message	The content of the communication. May be a mix of media.
Publication	The combination of the message and the media that “render” it.
Crossmedia	When using more than one media to publish a message. The message is here split somehow on different media.
Polypublishing	A way to use a given message on several media. Here the source is unique and the publishing process will eventually adapt it on the given media.

To illustrate some of these terms, let us think about an article. From author’s point of view, it is a message. When printed on a newspaper, or published on a web page, the article

becomes a (part of a) publication. The publishing process is the manipulation of the message to make it fit on the chosen publication.

Advertisement often uses crossmedia campaigns in which each publication is used as a part of the whole message. Involved traditional publications are newspaper or magazine ads, posters, radio, tv and movies ads, web sites, sms (and sometimes smart phones applications).

Polypublishing is interesting for newspapers: the same article is published on the paper and on the web site. Of course, the layout of the two publications will be different and some content must be adapted (image resolution for example). The publication process will take care of these differences.

Media and communication challenges

Electronic media are split into different categories; text, image, video, info graphics, animation. They all have their own rules of publication. They depend on publication technologies. For example a video cannot be viewed on a print product.

These media can be combined to form a message. A recorded interview (sound) may be written for a printed publication and presented with the sound on a web page. The choice of (a set of) publication is crucial to meet the message goals.

All actors are concerned with these aspects of technology and communication. The message and the target audience help to determine the publications to use. Then the required media have to be produced. In a crossmedia application, the used media have to be adapted to the specific publication: the same text should not be used on a printed page, on a blog page or on twitter. This changes the usual publication processes we know.

Today it is easy to produce technically good quality media. An HD digital camera and the related editing software are available at a reasonable price. However, to get high quality content still requires a good knowledge and experience. Technology is simple but communication is complex.

Traditional professions, such as journalism, are changing. People and organizations have to adapt themselves.

Radio and television merging

Media producer need to be more powerful in this convergence, this is why some of them merge together. In the French speaking part of Switzerland, the public radio and television have built a unique company. That fulfils the wishes of the SSR national project “convergence and efficiency of medias”. The SSR is the Swiss company of radio and television broadcasting which is the biggest public audiovisual group of Switzerland.

The goal is to create synergies between their various publications on one hand, and generate essential savings on the other hand. The will is to guarantee the offer’s plurality, the programme quality and the coherence of the respective editorial policy and finally, encourage reciprocal improvement.

With this new organization, synergies between programmes should be created. This new configuration will favour new content production, bi- or tri-media (television, radio, web), as results of the convergence. Specific contents of each media which have no reason to fuse (like fiction TV, musical programmes on radio) will keep their existence as usual.

As mentioned before, journalists have to change their mentality regarding this change. The reality shows us that it is not simple. The organization of the enterprise may change. The workflow as well as the working environment (offices) may have to be addressed, like the example with the “Blick” mentioned below.

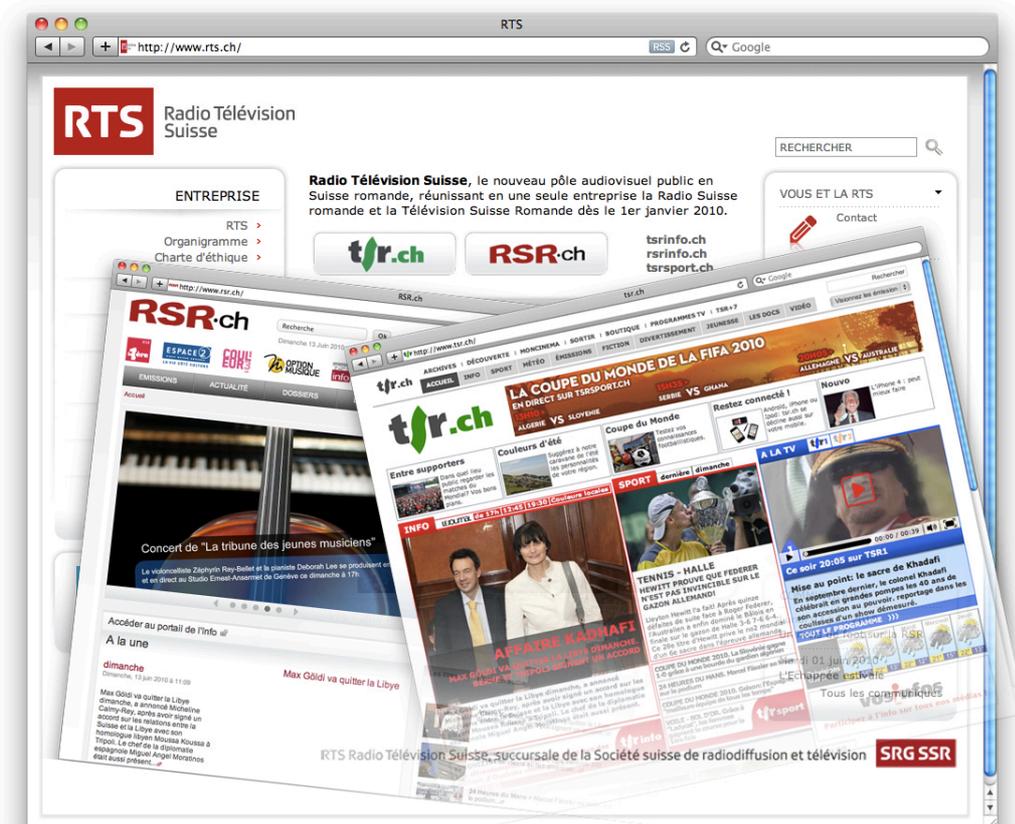


Figure 1 : TSR and RSR common website

Newsroom at « Blick »

With editorial press media, we can observe the same situation. Printed newspapers are not enough for the readers. Most of them want to read the news on digital devices; they also want to be informed more precisely on a subject and at a specific time. This is the goal of the electronic media. The amount of these emergent technologies forces the publisher to be reactive on several domains, respectively, several media.

In Switzerland we have a great example with the newspaper “Blick”. It recently created a new newsroom which is totally convergent process oriented. The three editorials (SonntagsBlick, Blick am Abend and website Blick¹), also from Ringier’s editor, where produced by individual editorial offices. From the beginning of the year 2010, it has not been the case anymore.

In the Ringier editorial, they decided therefore to build an impressive brand new Newsroom of 2500m². The room center is “the Bridge”, place to take the decisions. There, the

four editors-in-chief display and coordinate their products in front of a 12m² wall full of screens (see figure 2). Each of them knows on what the other is working on and for which publication. All the news from Switzerland come at this place. 200 journalists, photographers, pages designers bring their own ideas and sell them creatively for

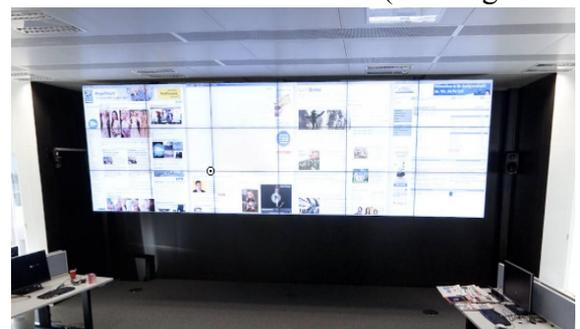


Figure 2 : Blick screen wall

¹ *SonntagsBlick* is a weekly newspaper / *Blick am Abend* is a daily newspaper

their own publication. Each title of Blick has to keep its own particularity. As a complement, a fully furnished web/tv studio belongs to the Newsroom.

This style of new working process speaks for the development of the quadri-media with a great synergy between print, tv, radio and web. At long-term, it may become a need.

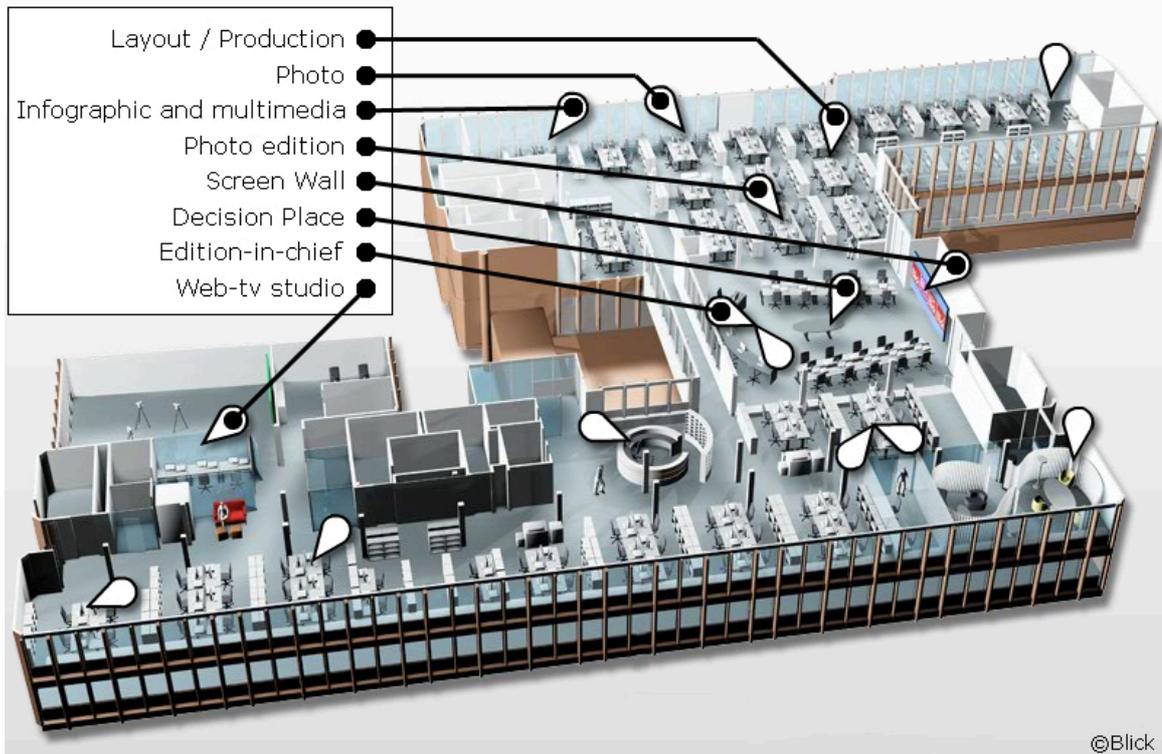


Figure 3: Blick new newsroom

Recent proof of concept at Comem⁺

With our students we managed a project addressing the three aspects: technical, communication and management.

One based on a communication course, one on prepress technologies and one related to Polypublishing & Crossmedia.

Communication, content production and web site

The subject proposed was “Places at comem+”. The aspect of human meeting areas was important in particular to face the students to the concept of proxemic and human exchange. The other important aspect was the relation between students. Each of them had a specific role: editor-in-chief, editor assistants, journalists, and a multimedia team composed of photographers and video producers

They had to plan editorial meetings, interviews and everything useful to produce messages (articles) using all electronic media available (text, photo, video, sound...). Then, they published these articles while respecting a story with some logical relation inside their publication. A simple web site was chosen (Wordpress Blog) as the main publication system. In this exercise, they worked in a newsroom, mixing all the roles mentioned before. The time to do this exercise was short, about six days from the working idea on the subject to the published product.

Print version

In a following lecture on prepress, groups of students with the messages produced in the first step, produce a printed version of the whole. They manage this job using Adobe InDesign.

The goal was to adapt the text and image layout and pick up again the content done in the previous lecture.

Polypublishing & Crossmedia

The last step was a technical experiment: using the original messages.

The goal was to make a proof of concept for an automated crossmedia publication process. Based on the same content produced in the first step, we wanted to produce a 3 media coherent publishing tool for: a website, a pdf version for each articles as well as one containing the entire publication and an audio output for each articles, using speech synthesis and voice markup language. Students had to:

- Structure, work on the original content and store it on a standard open format (XML)
- Develop and setup publishing processes for every media
 - XSL transformation for articles (xml to xhtml), XSL-FO for pdf, XML transformation to produce SSML markup and then an mp3 file for each article
- Set up a web site to hold all these media.

Convergent Media Center

As we have seen, media industry is evolving. With Internet, main media producers have taken the curve and have developed synergies between their original publication (print, radio or TV) and their presence on the Web.

But this is not over. New devices as well as new technologies on existing ones challenge over and over the communication best practices.

We are at the beginning of crossmedia publishing. This trend involves new ways of communication. From thinking the message to its delivery, the paths become more and more complex.

How should I use these new media? What combination of media is best suited for my message? Who are the providers for these new ways of publishing? What are the tools adapted to this new trend? What are the costs of going crossmedia? What will be the most popular media tomorrow?

These are only a few of the questions that came in mind when we thought about it. No actor, today, can say it has THE solution. We think that there may be NO universal solution. We have seen the difficulties and challenges that we all have to face regarding these problems.

And the technical part of the problem is not the most difficult! Human organization, costs, objective definition, adaptability are some probably more challenging other issues!

As an educational actor with applied research and development facilities, can we get the answers? Obviously, we have not them now. But we have to find the ways to get them. And that is the main objective of our new Convergent Media Center.

Our students have to be aware of these challenges and this is what we want to develop in our CMC: facing the students with the present and future reality. The idea is to immerse them through workshops implementing most of the aspects mentioned in this paper. The learning of the process, the communication, the human management, the technical aspects are important in our point of view.

Regarding these technical aspects, one of our students is working on a system which can store, index and search media produced within the CMC.

Media enterprises are not the only ones that have to deal with this convergence. Non-media enterprises (such as big companies) are facing the same challenges. This enlarges opportunities for our future engineers.