

The Journalist 2.0

The future of your magazine is up for discussion as digital convergence hits the NUJ.

This issue has not been printed and is available only as a pdf from the NUJ website. The NUJ national executive's motive for doing this was to save the cost of print, post and packaging, but it comes at a time when the relationship between print and internet is changing fast.

The Journalist Editorial Advisory Board is already working on a plan to go online with a site — a proper website, not pdfs — launching later this year. The relationship to the printed magazine — and to the union's official website — are under discussion.

What do members think? What do you want from the union's publication? Do you want more or fewer issues, a website only or a hybrid? Or nothing at all?

Below is a sample of the comments the union has had over the online appearance of this issue. But this is a one-off. The Journalist is now kicking off a debate to which all can contribute.

Right, CHRIS WHEAL argues that the editorship should be a full-time freelance job, running a fully interactive 'Web 2.0' website.



JOHN HARRIS/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

Chris Wheal is a freelance and chair of the NUJ Professional Training Committee

AT AN NUJ Annual Delegate Meeting in the early 1990s, when the Journalist had been cut to six issues a year because of the then financial crisis, one London Freelance Branch delegate suggested that the editorship should not be a full-time post, but freelance. He was heckled and I was the first to condemn him, but with hindsight, perhaps he was right.

The role, which attracts a full-time official's salary of more than £45,000, involves more than just editing the magazine. For years the editor was also the press officer for the union. The current incumbent, Tim Gopsill, has taken on other roles, including "servicing" committees (organising meetings and dealing with correspondence) — currently for the Ethics Council. He launched the union's website, was its first health and safety official, and he edited and wrote much of the report of last year's multimedia working party.

Being both an independent editor and a union apparatchik is a difficult balancing act that few can or would choose to do. Tim Gopsill estimates that about 60 per cent of his time is spent editing the magazine.

The last time the editor was up for election was 1998. Five prospective candidates requested application packs but, in the end, nobody but Tim Gopsill applied. Two of those who did not said their reason was that they wanted only to be editor and not a union official. So is it possible to create a job of editor alone when Tim Gopsill retires in a couple of years time?

General Secretary Jeremy Dear says the full cost of employing the editor is about £65,000. This year's budget for producing the magazine, excluding the salary, is £204,500, with each issue costing just under 70p per member. Even including the overheads, this is only 90p per copy.

If a freelance were offered about 60 per cent of the total cost of an editor, the fee would be about £40,000 for ten

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THE JOURNALIST ONLINE: WHAT MEMBERS SAY

I spend more than enough time looking at a computer screen and really don't want to have to do more. I realise the need to save money and I would be happy to pay the 70p cost of receiving a printed copy

Roger Jones, Warwickshire

This completely undermines our faith in the newspaper and magazine business. Many members will not bother to access the NUJ site

Michael Commins, Mayo, Ireland

I applaud your experiment. The magazine is wasteful of money, plastic, energy, and paper. Could we have a

corresponding cut in membership fees?

Leyla Boulton, Financial Times

By all means use the web to complement the Journalist but do not shut the door on print and paper. There's life in it yet

Terence Burke, Financial Times

The number of readers will drop substantially as a result of this change. Of all unions, the NUJ really should be able to sustain a printed publication

Chris Wilson, Lewes, East Sussex

I am sure this will damage links with members and decrease their support.

Many members who read it thoroughly

when it comes through the post will not bother if it comes online

Trevor Goodchild, London E11

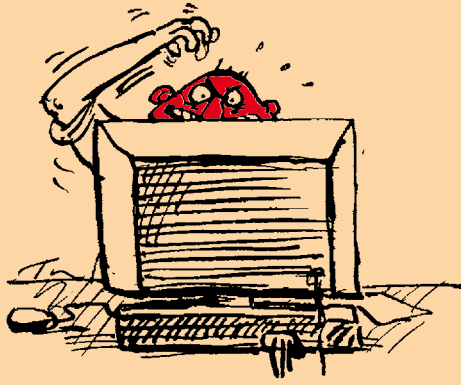
A magazine is something most of us stuff into our briefcases to pick up to dip into. This is one of those nice ideas that in theory ought to work, but actually won't

Peter Moeller, Ipswich

I'm afraid I require the NUJ's mighty organ to be in my hand, not on a website. This is a really bad move, particularly for members who aren't in a chapel, and don't attend branch meetings

Stewart Perkins, Wolverhampton

Email your comments to journalist@nuj.org.uk



PIXIES NEED FAIRY DUST

Headlines and trails written for websites need to tell the readers exactly what is going on, says **HUMPHREY EVANS**

HEADLINES ON websites have to work fast. One commentator* suggests you have just two hot words at the beginning of a headline which are all that readers take in when scanning for information that interests them. This is a useful discipline for headline writers of all kinds: stick two info-laden words up front so readers know what's going on.

But there's a new kind of headline peculiar to websites, which at the Guardian they call "pixies", presumably because they're little pics. Some call them picture trails or come-ons. They're important in getting readers to click through to the stories. You need to make sure the meaning is clear if they're going to work.

Every pixie has two lines. You could call them decks, of a single line with up to 16 characters. Line 1, which they call the trail strap, sets the general topic. Line 2, the link text, conveys something more specific.

A rollover caption, which shows up when the cursor hovers over the picture, can run to 55 characters and wavers between adding extra headline-style information and acting as a standfirst.

One Guardian pixie featured a photo of Johnny Depp in full Pirates of the Caribbean mode under the double headline Piracy and Zut Alors! Unrevealingly elusive, n'est-ce pas?

The rollover text read: "Sarkozy backs new policy to tackle French downloaders". This shows what is wrong with the headlines – there was no mention of computers and no direct reference to France.

"Piracy" and "Zut alors!" make some sort of sense when we know that the story is about internet piracy. But that is the wrong way round.

People writing headlines, particularly headlines for websites, must continually remind themselves that readers have no idea of what is about to hit them. The subject should be spelt out, rather than alluded to. In this case you might think about "Internet piracy" and "France cracks down".

Remember, too, that print usually provides more context. An article on internet piracy in France in the print version of the Guardian, for example, would have been in the technology section. Material on websites usually has to stand alone.

*Find out more at www.useit.com where the commentator and researcher Jakob Nielsen outlines his findings

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issues a year. Such a change – effectively offering a five-year freelance contract – might attract a journalist thinking of taking the self-employment plunge. That would increase the number of people standing for the post and create a lively election period, with candidates outlining the editorial direction they intend for the Journalist.

But all the NUJ would save is £25,000 a year. There are much bigger saving plans afoot, particularly as the biggest costs are printing, postage and distribution. One proposal is to produce the magazine as a downloadable PDF for all but a few issues a year. That way, the editing and production roles would stay the same.

A better option, surely, would be to embrace the multi-media working party's report – as drafted by the current editor – and have a new Journalist website as a full-on multi-media service with the editor doing video and podcasting and photography as well as writing. The site could integrate a bulletin board and blogs and offer an RSS feed.

User-generated content could come in the form of union bodies posting updates of their activities, images from meetings and picket lines and messages of support from fellow

An online Journalist would show that the NUJ can go multimedia in a well-planned way

members around the country. The NUJ's nitty-gritty could be covered, with committee chairs open to scrutiny and questions from the members. It could even be our very own social networking site. Web 2.0? This would be Journalist 2.0.

It would also demonstrate that the NUJ can go multimedia in a planned, well thought-out and funded way. The current editor spends between 60 per cent of his time on the Journalist. We know that producing multimedia content takes longer than producing single media content. So make the editor's role full-time, with no committees to service or reports to write.

There won't be magazines to lay out, but instead of that work, the website content will need subbing properly (so rarely done on most websites these days). And if just a little of the savings from scrapping the printing, postage and distribution costs, could go on more multimedia contributors, the NUJ could have one of the most up-to-date websites and still save money.

It is time to make the editor of The Journalist a full-time role, not just a full-time job.

