

Is There a Better Structure for News Providers?

The Potential in Charitable
and Trust Ownership

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9. Non-Profit Journalism Entrepreneurialism in the United States

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There is a long tradition of financially successful, non-profit journalism in the United States, in some cases the incipient organisations substantially aided by timely technological innovations. And in recent years, in direct response to the severe contraction of for-profit, commercial newsrooms and its real-life ramifications, we have been witnessing the emergence of a new, non-profit journalism ecosystem of local and national reporting centres.

In 1846, the invention of the telegraph enabled four faraway US newspapers attempting to cover the Mexican war to ‘actively collect news as it breaks, rather than gather already published news’, and soon the Associated Press was born, incorporated in New York as a not-for-profit, tax-exempt, news co-operative. Today it has roughly 4,000 employees and delivers news around the clock to more than 130 countries and 1 billion readers, listeners, and viewers. AP reporting, including its photo journalism, has won forty-nine Pulitzer Prizes (Associated Press, 2011).

And of course, some of the best known publishers in the US are non-profits including (with their corporate names and their publications launch dates in parentheses), *National Geographic* (National Geographic Society, 1888), the *Christian Science Monitor* (The First Church of Christ, Scientist, 1908), *Consumer Reports* (Consumers Union, 1936), *Foreign Affairs* (Council on Foreign Relations, 1922), *Mother Jones* (Foundation for National Progress, 1976), *Harpers* (Harper’s Magazine Foundation, 1980, although the magazine was a for-profit venture from 1850 until then), the *St Petersburg Times* (The Poynter Institute, 1978, although it was privately owned from 1884 to then), and many others.

In 1970 the Public Broadcasting System (PBS) began operation, and the following year National Public Radio (NPR) went on the air. Both began with government and philanthropic foundation and individual



‘donors like you’ funding, which is what sustains them now. Their high-quality programming, from *Frontline* and *The News Hour* to *All Things Considered* and *Morning Edition*, has won numerous journalism awards. Today, according to their latest data, more than half the US population, over 170m Americans, use public media – via 368 public television stations, 934 public radio stations, hundreds of online services, education services, and in-person events and activities (Sefton, 2010). And few, if any, national news organisations can match the audience growth of NPR, which has approximately *doubled* its number of weekly listeners to 33m Americans since 2001 (National Public Radio, 2009; Everhart, 2009).

Against this non-profit media tradition and backdrop, and even more specifically within the small community of serious-minded, independent reporters, a rising frustration with the inherent editorial reticence and practical limitations of the commercial news media began to occur in the 1980s and especially the 1990s. Understanding the past decades of disillusionment is essential to understanding the recent bursts of non-profit investigative reporting entrepreneurialism by undaunted, determined veteran reporters and editors.

A rising frustration with the inherent editorial reticence and practical limitations of the commercial news media began to occur in the 1980s and especially the 1990s

Throughout the twentieth century, despite the arrival of new means of communication such as radio, broadcast and cable television and then the internet, the most original reporting and the most extensive, substantive public service journalism in America was initiated, supported, and published by newspapers. The courageous publication by *The New York Times* and *Washington Post* of the secret history of the Vietnam War known as the Pentagon Papers in 1971, and their and other news organisations’ strong coverage of the Watergate scandal culminating in the only resignation of a sitting US President, Richard Nixon, was and remains the apogee of independent journalism in America. Those unprecedented events – along with muscular reporting about the US conduct of the Vietnam War by David Halberstam, Neil Sheehan, Seymour Hersh, and others, as well as the national news media’s awakening about gross, long-standing racial disparities and injustices in the South and its subsequent close coverage of the historic civil rights struggle between 1955 and 1968 – altogether represent US history’s high-water mark in the struggle between raw political power and democratic values, including freedom of the press.

But inherent and deepening financial tensions within the newspaper business itself began to become apparent. For one thing, many major

US newspapers had gone public beginning in the late 1960s and to those within the journalism profession it seemed as though increasingly, over time, faceless, out-of-town shareholders were insisting on higher and higher quarterly earnings at the expense of quality news coverage. For a brief glimpse into how this pressure changed things, consider what happened inside Knight Newspapers, which owned fifteen newspapers at the time it went public in April 1969. When the company's co-founder and editorial chairman, John S. Knight, was invited to speak to a gathering of Wall Street investors he reportedly told them, 'Ladies and gentlemen, I do not intend to become your prisoner.' He said that 'as long as I have anything to do with it we are going to run the papers. We are going to spend money sometimes that [you] wouldn't understand why, for future gains and we [do] not intend to be regulated or directed by [you] in any respect.' Not surprisingly, his company colleagues never invited him to another analysts meeting.

For eighteen years Gene Roberts was executive editor of the flagship Knight newspaper, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, and during that time the paper won seventeen Pulitzer Prizes. But as the corporate obsession with profits increased throughout the 1980s he became frustrated and finally, in 1990, he quit. It was almost a 'prescription for suicide', Roberts said (in an interview in New York in June 2007), 'to keep the profits up, which were very large, 20%, 30%, depending on what newspaper you were talking about.'

That's a profit margin far, far above what the typical American business had. So to keep the profit margins up and please Wall Street, newspapers began eating their seed corn. And they started cutting the space for news, and then the staff that gathered the news. And at the very moment in time when computers were becoming competition and you had 24-hour cable television coming along during the same period, and newspapers were being challenged as never before.

But many of the managers of newspapers looked at it [as though] there was no competition anymore, not direct competition with other newspapers. There are few competitive markets left. So they, in effect, began to speak of newspapers as a franchise which basically could give the reader less and charge more. And, of course, readers reacted to that . . .

At a very moment in time when newspapers should have been responding to a changing world, digitalisation, all of this, instead of giving the reader more, we ended up giving the reader significantly less. And newspapers are becoming less relevant. And this is a tragedy for democracy. (Roberts, 2007)

Today the *Philadelphia Inquirer* has *half* the number of reporters covering the Philadelphia metropolitan area that it had in 1980. And in the same period of time the total number of newspaper reporters in the Philadelphia area dropped from 500 to 220 (Pew Research Center, 2006). Nationally, Leonard Downie Jr. and Michael Schudson found in a study commissioned by Columbia University in 2009 that the number of newspaper editorial employees has dropped by 33% – from more than 60,000 in 1992 to about 40,000 in 2009 (Downie and Schudson, 2009).

Obviously there now are vastly fewer people today to report, write and edit original news stories about our infinitely more complex, dynamic world; fewer journalists to hold those in power accountable. The oldest and largest membership and training organisation in the world for enterprise journalism, Investigative Reporters and Editors, saw its membership drop more than 30%, from 5,391 in 2003, to a ten-year low of 3,695 in 2009. And entries for the Pulitzer Prize in investigative reporting are down more than 40% (Walton, 2000). To put all of this in worrisome perspective, at the same time as the historic shrinking of newspaper, radio, and television newsrooms across America over three decades starting in 1980, the number of public relations specialists and managers doubled from approximately 45,000 to 90,000 people (McChesney and Nichols, 2010).

From 1977 to 1988, I worked at ABC News and then at CBS News program *60 Minutes* as a producer. My next to last year at CBS, I watched and winced as the most respected producers – friends and colleagues I was proud to know and work with inside the hallowed network news division made famous by the likes of Edward R. Murrow and Walter Cronkite – were unceremoniously fired. Because I was relatively young and therefore cheap salary-wise, I was spared. Within months of becoming the chief executive officer of CBS Inc., Laurence Tisch in 1987 had ‘launched the biggest single staff and budget reduction in network TV history. When the dust had settled, hundreds had lost their long secure jobs, news bureaus had been shuttered, and CBS was but a shell of its former self.’¹ There unfortunately have been even bigger single staff reductions since 1987; indeed, network television newsrooms are roughly *half* the size today that they were in the late 1980s.²

My particular interest had been very simple. Hired fresh out of graduate school (the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies) as an off-air investigative reporter by ABC News in Washington in the wake of the Watergate scandal and then later as a producer for senior correspondent Mike Wallace at *60 Minutes*, all I had wanted to do was to find an unfettered place to investigate and expose abuses of power. And while I had investigated literally hundreds of possible and important national and even international stories for possible

¹ Douglas Gomery, ‘Tisch, Laurence, U.S. Media Mogul’, Chicago: Museum of Broadcast Communications; www.museum.tv/eotvsection.php?entrycode=tischlauren.

² *State of the News Media 2010* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism; accessible online at www.pej.org), executive summary, 3.

and actual broadcast by the two respective networks, I had gradually come to a painful realisation. As Cronkite had once observed about his own medium: ‘the networks, including my own, do a first-rate job of disseminating the news, but all of them have third-rate news-gathering organisations. We are still basically dependent on the wire services. We have barely dipped our toe into investigative reporting.’³

Worse, I had seen firsthand certain nationally important stories not pursued, certain well-connected rich and powerful people and companies consciously not investigated. In a highly collaborative medium, I had found myself working with managers I no longer could completely trust journalistically or professionally, especially if any public criticism or controversy might arise - a fairly likely occupational hazard for an investigative reporter. My job was to produce compelling, important investigative journalism for a national audience then of 40m Americans, but after the broadcast, if there was the slightest ‘heat’ it was excruciatingly obvious to me who would be expendable. My sense of aloneness and vulnerability was palpable.

On 17 October 1988, days before my 35th birthday, after an unusually gruelling and contentious story production process, the morning after my investigative segment led the broadcast, in the midst of a four-year contract, with a family to support, a monthly mortgage payment due each month, and no savings at all, I abruptly quit *60 Minutes*. Producers there usually retire, voluntarily or involuntarily - but hardly anyone ever just up and quits the highest rated, longest running, prime-time television programme.

Beyond my own recent experience at CBS, for many reasons I had become frustrated that major investigative reporting did not seem to be particularly valued by national news editors, regardless of media form. Occasionally I had seen investigative reporter friends’ and colleagues’ stories unjustifiably resisted, reduced, or rebuffed by their respective news organisations. National news organisations often seemed only to reactively report the various systemic abuses of power, trust, and the law in Washington - from the Iran-Contra scandal to the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) corruption scandal to the Defense Department’s procurement prosecutions of more than 100 people; from the savings and loan disaster, including the related ‘Keating Five’ Senate influence scandal, to the first resignation of a House Speaker (Jim Wright) since 1800, all of which occurred in the mid to late 1980s. In Washington there was very little proactive, original investigative journalism about these or other subjects, and, equally galling to me, smug denial instead of apologetic humility by the national press corps despite its underwhelming, lacklustre pursuit of these major abuses of power and systemic corruption.

³ Howard Kurtz, ‘Anchors in an Unmoored World’, *Washington Post* (27 July 2009), C5. This comment was made by Cronkite in 1966 to *Time Magazine*, two years before *60 Minutes*, which would become known for occasional investigative segments, premiered.

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Weeks after quitting, against all odds and the overwhelming advice of many highly intelligent, respected people in addition to friends of mine inside CBS, and while eschewing lucrative job offers from other TV networks, I decided to begin a non-profit investigative reporting organisation. I knew almost nothing about the non-profit world, had no management, financial, or fundraising experience, had never started anything in my life, and I also understood the bleak reality that most new ventures fail. Illogically, I hoped that mine would somehow succeed.

I asked two very talented, trusted journalist friends living and working in different media and on opposite coasts who did not know each other, Alejandro Benes and Charles Piller, to serve on the Board of Directors of this new organisation, and they agreed. I was chairman of the board and the executive director. In part because the 'investigative reporting' names had already been taken by non-profit organisations – the Fund for Investigative Journalism in Washington (1969), which provided Seymour Hersh with some travel money to break the My Lai story, Investigative Reporters and Editors (1975), and the Center for Investigative Reporting in Berkeley, California (1977) – I proposed and we adopted the 'Center for Public Integrity' as the new group's name. While it sounded a bit pretentious and maybe even a little odd, all investigative reporting seemed to be about, on some level, affronts to 'public integrity' and the way things *ought* to be. The Center for Public Integrity was incorporated in Washington, DC on 30 March 1989, its mailing address a PO Box. Months later the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) approved its tax exempt status as a 501(c)(3) organisation and on 1 October 1989 I began working as the first and only full-time employee, from the upstairs guest bedroom of my suburban Virginia home.

Soon we had an Advisory Board of distinguished Americans, including Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr., political scientists James MacGregor Burns and James David Barber, political communications scholar and then University of Pennsylvania Annenberg School Dean Kathleen Hall Jamieson, Notre Dame president emeritus Father Theodore Hesburgh, veteran journalists Bill Kovach and Hodding Carter, Harvard sociologist William Julius Wilson and others.

The question was: is there a way to create a modest attempt at a journalistic utopia, an investigative milieu in which no one would tell me what or who *not* to investigate, the final published story or report unfettered by time and space limitations? I was not out to change the world; I did not have an 'agenda' except a desire to conduct major, thorough, responsible journalistic investigations about the origins

and abuses of power in relation to the public policy decision-making processes in the United States and, eventually, around the world. Then and today, as stated on the organisation's website, the mission is 'to produce original investigative journalism about significant public issues to make institutional power more transparent and accountable'. The modus operandi: to investigate macro, systemic issues of great public relevance, using a 'quasi-journalistic, quasi political science' approach, in order to publish sweeping reports about government and public policy distortions of democracy which also name names.

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This idea, this model for a more thorough, macro approach to tracking those in power in Washington, would later be resoundingly affirmed in the new organisation's very first report, 'America's Frontline Trade Officials', which was presented at a well-attended National Press Club news conference, and was covered by C-SPAN, CNN, ABC News program *20/20* and many others. It disclosed that 47% of White House trade officials over a fifteen-year period became paid, registered 'foreign agent' lobbyists for countries or overseas corporations after they left government. This 201-page report, which I substantially authored, enabled me to more fully disgorge and tell the *60 Minutes* 'Foreign Agent' story still in my craw at that time. The report prompted a Justice Department ruling, a General Accounting Office report, a Congressional hearing, it was cited by four presidential candidates in 1992 and it was partly responsible for an Executive Order in January 1993 by President Clinton, placing a lifetime ban on foreign lobbying by White House trade officials. Clearly, this approach of systematic investigation and announced findings to the national news media worked.

But, necessarily, before that occurred, by May 1990 the Center had secured enough money to open its first office in downtown Washington, DC, from a foundation, some companies, some labor unions, and a consulting contract with ABC News (although for that first office lease, my home was required as collateral). The issue of perceived financial 'purity' and exactly from whom the Center should seek and accept money has been an introspective feature of nearly every board meeting since 1989. Eventually, beginning in 1995, for example, we stopped raising funds from companies and labor unions because of their direct economic interests in influencing public policy; the non-partisan Center does not accept donations from governments, corporations, political parties, advocacy organisations, or anonymous donors.

The first full year of operation, 1990, the Center raised and spent approximately \$200,000. From late 1989 to 2004, cumulative Center revenues and expenditures were roughly \$30m, more than 90% of that from foundations such as MacArthur, Knight, Ford, Schumann, Carnegie, Open Society Institute, Annenberg, Newman, and many others. No year was more successful financially than 2004, in which our fourteenth book, *The Buying of the President 2004* (Perennial/HarperCollins) was on the *New York Times* (short or extended) bestseller list for approximately three months. Revenues were \$6.49m, and expenditures were \$4.54m. In 2003 and 2004, the full-time staff reached forty people, with fifteen to twenty or more paid interns each year, and more than 200 paid contract writers, readers, or editors in twenty-five countries on six continents.⁴

Transparency and accountability have always been important values, especially with a name like the Center for Public Integrity. All major donors are disclosed, as are annual reports, annual IRS 990 disclosure forms for at least the past three years and names and brief bios of every employee.

No reporting project is initiated or final-approved for publication without the personal approval of the executive director, who functions essentially as both the executive editor and publisher. The earliest Center reports were issued on paper and distributed at news conferences conducted at the National Press Club; from 1990 to 2004 I held thirty-five of them, roughly half of them nationally televised on C-SPAN; Center findings or perspectives were covered in approximately 10,000 news stories in the United States and throughout the world.

In July 1994 the Center entered a very topical, bitter Washington fray, positioned as an 'honest broker' in the midst of the political battle over the Clinton administration's health care legislation. *Well-Healed: Inside Lobbying for Health Care Reform*, more than 200 pages and the work of seventeen researchers, writers, and editors, chronicled the activities of 662 health care interests, analysing and presenting everything from privately funded trips and 'revolving door' examples to campaign contributions, personal investments, and other information. The news conference was covered by more than fifty reporters plus seven cameras, including ABC's *Nightline* and *World News Tonight*, NBC's *Today Show*, CNN's *Inside Politics* and *Newsmakers*, and *The New York Times*, etc.

The first solely online reports began to appear in 1999, although the Center website went up initially in 1996. The first commercially published book, *Beyond the Hill: A Directory of Congress from 1984 to 1993. Where Have All the Members Gone?* (University Press of America) was released in 1995, and it revealed the post-employment practices of 350 former members of Congress. Center book exposés were selected as the runner-up finalist in the Investigative Reporters and Editors' (IRE) annual book award competition for 1996, with the publication

⁴ www.publicintegrity.org, 'About Us' and under 'IRS Compliance' see the IRS 990 forms for 2004. The 2000 Annual Report actually covers the first 10 years of the Center.

of *The Buying of the President*, in 1997 with *Toxic Deception*, in 1998 with *The Buying of the Congress*, and in 2000 with *The Buying of the President 2000*. In 1999, *Animal Underworld: Inside America's Black Market for Rare and Exotic Species*, by Alan Green and the Center for Public Integrity, actually won the IRE book award. No author, group of writers, or publisher has been so consistently honoured for books for five consecutive years by the thirty-six-year-old association of 4,500 reporters and editors. Since it began operation, Center reports have won more than forty national journalism awards.

The release of reports on the web and occasionally in the nation's bookstores represented an historic change in the amplification and dissemination of the Center's investigative findings. The Center no longer had to depend solely on the news coverage judgement and goodwill of the news media to inform the public about its findings; now the Center was reporting directly to the public, and if traditional or 'mainstream' journalists also deemed it newsworthy, all the better.

The Center's investigative reports are probably best known for exposing political influence and its impact on public policy decision-making in Washington, DC, and in the fifty state capitals. We started out systematically investigating the conflicts of interest of national political party chairmen (*Private Parties*) and unpaid policy advisers to the major presidential candidates (*Under the Influence*), which no one had ever done. But soon we began to turn our sights towards the presidential campaign. Dozens of researchers, writers, and editors amassed and studied thousands of pages and half a dozen types of federal and state records in 1996, 2000, and 2004, to produce *The Buying of the President* exposés, the first political books to systematically examine the powerful special interests closely aligned with each of the major presidential candidates and published and available to voters weeks before any votes were cast in the primaries and caucuses.

The first book, serialised in *The New York Times*, provided substantial editorial basis for the 1996 *Frontline* documentary, 'So You Want to Buy a President?' and the various major candidates' 'Top Ten Career Patrons' lists moved worldwide on the wires. In the book's Foreword kindly written for us by Kevin Phillips, he observed that,

In the thirty-five-year cavalcade of presidential campaign books that began with Theodore White's landmark The Making of the President, 1960, no one has ever concentrated on the quiet but just as critical influence battle fought with checkbooks . . . Documentation like this has never before been compiled and published in advance of the election being described. Never. And the spotlight is scorching.⁵

⁵ Kevin Phillips, 'Foreword', to Charles Lewis and Center for Public Integrity, *The Buying of the President* (New York: HarperCollins/Avon, 1996), 1.

At one point, in 1996, *The New Yorker* referred to the organisation as ‘the center for campaign scoops.’ That same year the Center also broke, among other things, the Clinton White House Lincoln Bedroom fundraising scandal.

‘Fat Cat Hotel’ won the Society of Professional Journalists ‘public service in newsletters’ award, a first for the Center.⁶ It listed seventy-five donors to the Democratic Party who had slept over in the Clinton White House, part of a systematic plan to reward major contributors. Separately, from 1995 through 2004, the Center developed a fifty-states investigative focus on corruption in state legislatures, which culminated in *Our Private Legislatures: Public Service, Personal Gain*, a national investigation of conflicts of interest by state lawmakers, displayed on the website.⁷ That 2000 report, disseminated in embargoed fashion to a consortium of fifty leading newspapers in fifty states, won the IRE online investigative reporting award. We posted, analysed, and reported on the annual financial disclosure filings of more than 7,000 state lawmakers, exposing literally *hundreds* of apparent conflicts of interest. To my knowledge this was the first national investigative journalism about conflicts of interest and corruption in all fifty state capitals simultaneously.

In October 2003 the Center for Public Integrity published *Windfalls of War*, which included the major US government contracts in Afghanistan and Iraq, definitively revealing Halliburton, and its subsidiary, Kellogg, Brown & Root, to be, by far, the largest beneficiary.⁸ For six months twenty researchers, writers and editors worked on the project, filing seventy-three Freedom of Information Act requests and even suing the Army and the State Department (and ultimately winning the release of key, no-bid contract documents). That report, which was prepared by the Washington staff of the Center’s International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ), won the George Polk award.

The Consortium was the first, and is still the only, working global network, now approximately 100 people in fifty countries, of some of the world’s pre-eminent investigative reporters collaborating with each other to produce original international enterprise journalism. Indeed, the ICIJ-generated, original, investigative, online content – about such subjects as international cigarette smuggling, water privatisation, private military companies, climate change lobbying, the black market in blue fin tuna fishing, etc. - transformed the Center for Public Integrity into ‘the first global website devoted to international exposés’, according to the *Encyclopedia of Journalism*.⁹

⁶ Margaret Ebrahim, ‘Fat Cat Hotel’, *The Public i* (newsletter of The Center for Public Integrity), 2/5 (Aug. 1996); www.publicintegrity.org/assets/pdf/pi_1996_08.pdf.

⁷ Center for Public Integrity, *Our Private Legislatures: Public Service, Personal Gain*, 21 May 2000; <http://projects.publicintegrity.org/oi/report.aspx?aid=614>.

⁸ Kevin Baron, Maud Beelman, Neil Gordon, Laura Peterson, Aron Pilhofer, Daniel Politi, André Verlöy, and Brooke Williams contributed to this report, written by Ms Beelman: *Windfalls of War*, Center for Public Integrity, 30 Oct. 2003. <http://projects.publicintegrity.org/wow/report.aspx?aid=65>.

⁹ Mark Feldstein, ‘Investigative Reporters’, in Christopher H. Sterling (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Journalism* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2009), ii. 801.

Focused so intently on political influence and corruption in the US, it is probably not surprising that we also became intrigued with trying to find a new way of monitoring and reporting on corruption, government accountability, and openness around the world. That curiosity culminated in an unprecedented, 750,000-word Center report – by far the largest ever – published online in 2004, entitled *Global Integrity*, prepared by 200 paid social scientists, journalists and peer review editors in twenty-five countries on six continents. This massive project spawned a new non-profit organisation called Global Integrity with a more academic, social science orientation and quantitative methodological component and with greater and more diverse funding and capacity needs than the Center for Public Integrity. Since 2004 it has published very detailed, analytical, annual Global Integrity Reports and analyses about corruption issues in over 100 countries.¹⁰

The mark of a true institution is one that has been able to survive one or more leadership transitions. In 2004, after fifteen years at the helm of the Center for Public Integrity, I came to that sober realisation after passing a milestone birthday. At some point the founder simply has to leave the building, for the long-term well-being of the enterprise. I gave the shocked board one year's notice, but nonetheless, the Center's ensuing two difficult transition years following my departure were brutal to watch, frankly; my immediate successor was fired after seventeen months and was followed by a temporary interim director. Then the Board of Directors chose Bill Buzenberg, a veteran journalist and innovative news executive at newspapers and public radio for more than thirty-five years, as the fourth executive director of the Center for Public Integrity. It was a brilliant decision. The former National Public Radio London bureau chief and first NPR managing editor and vice president of news launched several new programmes, including *Talk of the Nation* and American Public Media's documentary unit *American RadioWorks*. Since his arrival at the Center in early 2007 he has demonstrated substantial talent, grace, vision, and leadership.¹¹ A few months after celebrating its twentieth anniversary, the Center for Public Integrity ended 2010 with annual income of \$8m, a full-time staff of 50 people, and very exciting new plans to embrace the digital age with new technologies, a new online platform and vastly expanded revenue potential.

When I stepped down as Center executive director and wrote my very last email to the staff on 30 December 2004, with the subject title 'Thank You and Farewell', I implored:

The Center must always maintain courageous, fearless 'edginess' and a willingness to expose abuses of power, from Presidents to multibillion dollar corporations. But edgy and

¹⁰ www.globalintegrity.org.

¹¹ www.publicintegrity.org, 'About Us' and under '2009 Annual Report', 16.

compelling must also always accompany fair and accurate reporting at the Center for Public Integrity, and nothing beneath this standard should ever be published. There is no such thing as too careful when it comes to information gathering . . .

‘The stakes,’ I said, ‘are very, very high, just as the opportunities to create high impact national and international journalism are extraordinary. Don’t ever let the bastards get you down or intimidate you. But also, don’t ever, in any way, enable them to diminish your credibility as a truth-teller.’

It is impossible to predict the longevity of an organisation, news or otherwise, to understand the precise moment when it has become a venerable, lasting institution, particularly in this temporal, fleeting world of shortening public attention spans, as founders, leaders, board members, staff, and their respective sensibilities come and go – whether for-profit or non-profit.

But ironically, amidst the commercial newsroom carnage, the thinner newspapers, the increasingly vapid TV newscasts, certain editorial values such as a dedication to original, accurate, substantive, thorough, fearless reporting suddenly stands out more than ever. Those values are the Center for Public Integrity’s values, indeed literally its entire *raison d’être*, and in terms of various quantitative measures – annual revenues, number of staff, audience interest, international web traffic and news coverage, peer recognition in the form of awards, etc. – all of its numbers are still climbing upwards.

Most interesting, in recent years dozens of other, new, similarly serious non-profit journalism organisations have been sprouting up throughout the United States. For some of the boldest members of the current Diaspora of immensely talented journalists with nowhere to work, starting a non-profit, online news site is vastly more appealing than the much bleaker prospect of leaving the profession itself. The editorial freedom, excitement and sublime satisfaction of a journalist creating and running his or her own news organisation are palpable – even if the editorial, administrative, and financial management responsibilities are formidable.

Late last year the Investigative Reporting Workshop I began in 2008 at the American University School of Communication in Washington published the first comprehensive analysis of the new journalism ecosystem of sixty ‘new and not-so-new non-profit journalism sites/organisations, providing citizens with vital information at the local community, regional, national and even international level, sometimes investigative, sometimes more explanatory, but all of it serious, public service journalism.’¹²

¹² Charles Lewis, ‘New Journalism Ecosystem Thrives’, Investigative Reporting Workshop, 29 Oct. 2010; <http://investigativereportingworkshop.org/ilab/story/ecosystem>.

The new journalism ecosystem includes at least 60 non-profit journalism sites/organisations

We found that thirty-eight of the sixty organisations had been created since 2006. Three of newest, most financially robust ventures were founded by donors themselves – ProPublica (Herb and Marion Sandler) in New York, The Bay Citizen (Warren Hellman) in San Francisco, and the *Texas Tribune* (John Thornton) in Austin, Texas. But nearly all of the new non-profit news organisations were actually begun by ‘newsroom editors and reporters who seldom wore suits or green eyeshades, folks long on guts but with little or no financial, entrepreneurial or management experience’. At least eight of the organisations are start-ups, with annual operating budgets of \$100,000 or less, which means that several experienced journalists are working for little or no pay to get their ventures off the ground, sweat equity. Some of these enterprises may fail, particularly during this difficult economic time. Two-thirds, or 443 of the 658 full-time employees at these sixty organisations, have prior professional journalism experience and roughly half (twenty-eight) of the non-profit news publishers have won awards for their reporting. Many of these organisations partner with the commercial news media, and the cumulative total of the annual budgets of the sixty non-profit organisations is between \$80m and \$85m, essentially contributions from philanthropic organisations and individuals.¹³

There are also evident sensibilities reflecting a beleaguered profession wanting to uphold its highest traditions and values into the future, and also take financial advantage of existing physical and technological infrastructure. Of the sixty organisations, fourteen are part of universities or separately incorporated but at universities, bringing in an educational dimension of inculcating the journalistic traditions and techniques to a new generation of reporters and editors. Half of the sixty analysed organisations have an editorial/ethics policy, which suggests some degree of conscientiousness and introspection about standards and practices. And in terms of transparency, 78% of the organisations disclose their donors, but only 22% (thirteen of sixty) post their annual IRS 990 form revealing annual operating budget and salary information.¹⁴

Finally, most of these local, regional and national journalism non-profit organisations have also come to realise that there is strength in numbers. In 2009, the Investigative News Network (INN) was formed, now consisting of more than fifty member non-profit news publishers and expected to grow in number and extend internationally. No one has ever attempted to organise and syndicate the best, purely investigative reporting output and talent of member organisations, but, among other things, INN is doing just that and much more. Stay tuned!¹⁵

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Charles Lewis, ‘Great Expectations: An Investigative News Network is Born. Now What?’, *Columbia*

All of this energy and activity is being watched closely by the lions of the profession. Barry Sussman, editor of the Nieman Watchdog Project at Harvard University, was the special Watergate editor at the *Washington Post* who oversaw the coverage of Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein. According to him, 'Great reporting is still being done by the traditional media, but there is very little of it. It is the nonprofit model... that shows the most promise. More than anything else I can think of, it will serve – is already serving – to hold leaders accountable and keep important issues in public view.' Sussman also noted that 'non-profit news organisations are important in another respect. The Watergate era made people see journalism as honest, worthwhile work. They don't today. The non-profit model, as it grows and strengthens and stays independent, could bring that spirit back and draw bright, idealistic young people into the profession. And wouldn't that be nice.'¹⁶

The ultimate winner, of course, is the public, provided with independent, in-depth journalism where it otherwise doesn't exist, wouldn't exist and, in multimedia, is in infinitely more accessible forms.

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