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## HOW WOULD YOU CHANGE THE 'NEW YORK TIMES'?

### Four Top Designers Rethink the Grey Lady

September 06, 2005  
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By [Jonah Bloom](#)

"The *New York Times* will never become a tabloid," its proprietor, Arthur Sulzberger Jr., told the World Association of Newspapers congress in Seoul, South Korea, this June. Not his first slap at modern newspaper trends: He has also gone on record calling quick-read tabs like *Metro* and youth-oriented newspaper offspring like *Red Eye* and *Red Streak* "condescending" and "bullshit."



#### Subway rider format

The journalist in me admires such devotion to longer

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Jonah Bloom, executive editor of *Advertising Age*.

How would **YOU** change the New York Times?. Email your thoughts to [comments](#).

stories, words over graphics and nuance over quick hits. The Sunday lounge in me loves him and his team for entertaining and enlightening me with that weighty load of pages that hits my doorstep at the weekend. But the subway rider in me envies the *Metro* and *AM New York* consumers who have taken over my car. While they flick easily, I wrestle with sections and jumps, battle inky fingers, retrieve escapee inserts from grimy corners and practice an origami-cum-yoga routine that involves fitting my paper around my fellow passengers.

In an age of mobile wireless communication, RSS feeds, podcasts, on-demand TV viewing and ever-multiplying information and entertainment options, how long will I, and others like me, put up with the multi-section-broadsheet experience? Already I'm shifting to reading my NYT entirely online.

#### Rethinking the Grey Lady

Of course, *The Times* is a beloved institution, and asking people whether it ought to change is like offering to knock down and rebuild their homes. Still, I managed to persuade a handful of brilliant designers to discuss how the *New York Times* might best adapt to the new consumer realities of the 21st century:

#### Brian Collins Executive creative director, Ogilvy:

"Almost all the news we receive today is squeezed through an entertainment filter. We have developed a quick-cut language for digesting happy-go-lucky-attention-deficit-disorder-on-demand news. Sure, as an A.D.D. poster-child there are times I love this. There's nothing wrong with a juicy story about Brad and Angelina sandwiched between stories of other impossibly good-looking people. But when I want my daily news, my head spins and I want answers, facts and depth. I read the *New York Times*.



Brian Collins, Ogilvy & Mather.

can take it to the beach, park, cab or subway. Reading it is an anchoring ritual for my family and me.

"But it's not my generation that will drive the need for design evolution; it will be the generation now in seventh grade that likes to read even low-resolution digital screens. These interfaces are transparent and second-nature to them. And with that said here's how I would develop the *New York Times* given total license:

"I'd launch *T Magazine*. It's a full-color glossy that bridges the short attention span and self-reflective interests of 15- to 25-year-olds with world news and events. T's content and visual style make the world smaller by joining profiles, personal essays and blog excerpts to a reporting style that brings individuals and their experience to the forefront as a lens to see a wider political or cultural context.

"T is a bridge between the entertainment-focused 'culture-of-me' and the informative style of *The New York Times* newspaper. Both T and *The New York Times* share a strong foundation of facts and hard news truths, but T

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focuses on connecting with its young target audience emotionally and then connecting all of its readers to each other.

"Alongside that we'd launch T Cafés. Co-branded partnership with a major national coffee shop, T Cafés are co-branded coffee store environments designed to bring the readers of *T Magazine* together in person to promote discussion and further inquiry (without taking the *New York Times* into the real estate or food service businesses). T Cafés are branded areas that have lounge seating and computers to link personal opinion, facts, and debate between people, fostering in-person debate and critical thinking about the issues of the day.

"And we'd have T Online. T Online sponsors reader blogs to express passions and concerns (some of which are excerpted in print) and T Connections software trolls the blogs for common themes connecting people to learn from each other."

### Lucie Lacava Award-winning newspaper architect:

"Personally, I love broadsheets, the size of the canvass and portability are still very special. But the future lies in having options. More is more. Just like ordering cable-TV packages where you pick the movie channels, or the sports package, you should be able to choose which sections to receive, or whether you want a compact or tabloid version. The newspaper of the future will have options for single urban people just as it will have options for families. The same consumer who is getting used to having convenient on-demand options in all their other media and entertainment is also a newspaper reader, so you have to design newspapers to be bought a la carte."

**"The same consumer who is getting used to having convenient on-demand options in all their other media and entertainment is also a newspaper reader, so you have to design newspapers to be bought a la carte."**

"A lot of my clients around the world have added a compact [tabloid], or are thinking about doing so. It doesn't have to have a negative impact on the information or advertising, but unfortunately the price for converting printing presses in the U.S. is still high, and many publishers don't believe there's a direct correlation between the investment and the financial rewards and worry that advertisers won't be persuaded of the benefits."

"The other problem right now is that many North American broadsheets are still poorly designed. Many of them follow the *New York Times* and the *Journal*, which have little clear hierarchy in terms of the most important stories. The *New York Times* needs more obvious story hierarchy -- increasingly readers want to know what their trusted source thinks is most important. And it could get leaner. Things like stock listings and classifieds need to go to the Internet, where they can be regularly updated.

"Today's *Times* consumers buy it for the title and not for the look, but the next generation have grown up with loud media -- everything is loud and tells you what it is. The *Times* gives readers little sense of what's inside. That needs to be clearer, because younger readers are used to briefs and the particulars being spelled out to them on the Web. The *Times* needs a better menu on the cover. There might be a story about video games, but it's never brought to the younger reader's attention. It's not that the *Times* doesn't have stories for younger readers, it's that they're difficult to find."

### Pelle Anderson Newspaper designer:

"I'm a great believer in newspapers: They don't need recharging, and can be used to light fireplaces and wrap trout in. Try that with a Palm Pilot!

"But, the newspapers of the world, and that includes the *New York Times*, will have to realize that they compete not in a newspapers market, nor in a media market, but in a time market. The core business idea of any newspaper (although the publishers and editors tend to avoid admitting to this) is to deliver a number of readers to the advertisers, or, more precisely, a certain exposure of the ads to a specific audience. The time the readers spend with the papers is the currency the newspapers sell to advertisers, and that time has been steadily diminishing since the '60s. What to do? To just go on producing what to a large extent is an increasingly irrelevant newspaper, like the *New York Times* does, is not a good idea.

**"The future will make a liar out of Sulzberger. The *New York Times* will certainly be transformed into a compact format. The derogatory term 'tabloid journalism' has largely lost its meaning in the rest of the world."**

"The laws of the market apply to the *New York Times* as well, and species that don't adapt will eventually perish. The future is coming, and it's coming fast.

"Some of the changes in newspapers I foresee within 10 years: The size will have shrunk from broadsheet to tabloid, then to half-Berliner or A4; the number of pages will be very limited, and the pages packed; white space will become scarce; there will be no stock market listings in print, these will be displayed on the phone, in real-time; newspaper/phone/PDA/wireless laptop will be 100% integrated; e-mail and SMS tailored to the individual reader/subscriber will be very important; bloggers will team up with newspapers, and vice versa; borders between "professional" writers and "amateurs" will (thankfully) become increasingly blurred, and newspapers brands will become less important; short info will beat long, personal views will beat objectivity.

"I think the future will make a liar out of Sulzberger. The *New York Times* will certainly be transformed into a compact format. *Le Monde* was always a compact, and so is now virtually every big quality newspaper in Britain, Germany and other European countries. The derogatory term 'tabloid journalism' has largely lost its meaning in the rest of the world, and it will do so in New York as well, when the time comes for the grey old lady to slim down.

"The legendary newspaperman and designer Louis Silverstein was the Hercules that cleaned out the stables of NYT non-design 30 years ago. While waving his big, stinking cigar, he transformed what basically was a non-designed newspaper into something you could actually read without hurting your eyes. But what was a design revolution at the time has today degenerated into a boring exercise in bad type, pages filled with either nice ads or dull grey editorial space, lousy news photos ... or brightly illustrated stories catering to the vested interests of Manhattan's real estate companies.

"There are 10 Things *The New York Times* of today needs to do to evolve:

1. Ask the readers what kind of paper they want, and give them that paper.
2. Change format into tabloid or smaller.
3. Learn how to use electronic media as a complement to the paper. They should develop tailored e-mail services a potentially big source of revenue, and a way of saving space in the paper as well.
4. Change typefaces all round ... looking old is no advantage these days, unless you're the new kid on the block (like the Moonies did with their black-letter nameplate and general design of *Washington*

- Star*, or like the people behind *New York Sun* do with their paper).
5. Give the photo editors a kick in the butt, and hire some new photographers.
  6. Decide how many pages the paper should be. Then throw out what doesn't fit into those pages. Forget 'All the news fit to print' and start printing only what fits into your readers' time slot!
  7. Change the rhythm of the paper in order to get more news space in the beginning of each section, not just the front pages.
  8. Devote designer energy to the news sections as well, not just the feature sections.
  9. Get a printing stock (paper) that works better with the printing equipment.
  10. Alternatively, get a printing plant that knows how to do the job.

"The broadsheet format is coming to an end. In Sweden, a country that is leading the trend toward compact (tabloid) format, there will soon be no more broadsheet papers left. The last year all major national and regional dailies changed from broadsheet to tabloid.

Many attribute the start of this fascination with the compact format to *Metro*. The international success of this newspaper has made it a standard-bearer for tabloid. But don't forget that reader surveys carried out for years by the traditional paid-for newspapers show that readers favor the compact format. The trend will continue in the future. My favorite format is the semi-Berliner (or micro format) such as you find in Switzerland and Austria."

### Seth Banks Director of global design, GE Healthcare:

"I would eliminate paper and go to a newly developed organic liquid-crystal flexible display. One presentation page that could be plugged in and updated prior to leaving the house, and everything would be downloaded into the memory. I'd like to try to eliminate paper altogether."



Seth Banks, GE Healthcare.

"This display, when I turn it on and select it, would show me all the different things I'd downloaded. On Monday I'd get different news -- maybe sports news rounded up from the weekend -- than I'd get on Friday, when maybe I'd want closing stock prices or something. When I flip it on it looks like a white sheet, like the electro-luminescent panels that were used in costumes in *Starlight Express*. It makes use of selective electronics -- applying a charge to certain areas of the sheet -- and smart technology.

"Requisite in this design is white space for visual relief and consistent typefaces. You'd need something different to sans serif to make it more readable and you'd be able to select your point size so that even older readers can read this without resorting to their glasses.

"I'd also take a serious look at hierarchies. These broadsheets should have an obvious top-to-bottom hierarchy, and they should be tested with readers. At the moment the hierarchies are confusing and you don't know what the editors regarded as most important.

"With this new way of reading you'd need a new payment system, effectively more of a subscription system, but it'd let you pay lots of different existing newspapers for their content, so that I could select several newspapers. I might have the editorial from the *Times*, along with the central columns from the *Journal* and the theater chat from the *Daily News*. If I make up my own newspaper this way, I can get it without advertising, but obviously I have to

pay for that.

“And the great thing with this technology is that graphics could be animated. It'd be fabulous to have that animation. Like the scene in Harry Potter. This newspaper would be very dynamic and there's no reason that it couldn't also be manifested in a synthesized voice, so that I can plug in an earpiece and listen to it as I'm walking to the office. That's the newspaper I want day to day. You still want print on Sundays, because there's something nice about that, but I want something more dynamic and easier to use during the week - and what a positive ecological impact.”

“How realistic is this? Completely realistic. Such technologies will be commercially viable within less than five years. We're already watching things on similar display technologies. GE Advanced Materials and many other companies have these kinds of things already.”

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