

Greensboro News & Record - Media Giraffe Profile

Greensboro News & Record

Lex Alexander / Ed Cone & John Robinson - citizen-journalism coordinator / free-lance columnist

"The Internet makes our current newspaper business model, with its artificially high profit margins, unsustainable. Companies need to decide, right now, whether they're going to stay in the journalism business or not, understanding that staying in means some significant capital investment right now and, according to everything you were taught in Econ 101, permanently lower profit margins in the long term."

Lex Alexander, in a Nov. 4, 2006 posting to the API/Media Center weblog (more below) "

Address: 200 East Market St., P.O. Box 20848

Location: Greensboro, NC, 27420-0848

Email: efcone@mindspring.com, www.edcone.com

Website: www.news-record.com/

Work: 336-373-5210

About

The Greensboro, N.C. News & Record has spawned a good deal of web innovation and some of the most active participants include its editor, John Robinson; Lex Alexander, the citizen-journalism coordinator; and Ed Cone, an earlier blogger who is no longer at the paper.

The *Blue Plate Special* blogside for students of New York University's journalism professor Jay Rosen profiled John Robinson on March 7, 2006.

Lex Alexander wrote in November 2005 at the blog of the Media Center at the American Press Institute:

"In 2004, the N&R's metro editor, Mark Sutter, produced a report recommending ways to boost readership. One of his recommendations was to turn the newspaper's Web site into more of a virtual town square, not only a trusted source of news and information but also a forum where the community could come to discuss its problems and issues and, we hope, work constructively toward solutions.

The paper's top editor, John Robinson, then turned to me right before Christmas last year and said, "Find ways we can make this happen and report back in a week." Allowing for vacation, I did."

"My suggestions, however, went beyond isolated, practical steps to comprise a vision in which the N&R converts its news operation from a fully professional, predominantly print news operation on the we-publish-you-read model to a model in which journalism is an ongoing conversation, a partnership between a core professional staff at the N&R and interested contributors in the community, conducted primarily online but with, at least for now, a print component.

"This vision was driven by three goals:

- 1) Keep the N&R alive as an independent, for-profit, local-news operation;
- 2) Follow our readership, and the advertisers it attracts, in its transition from print to online; and

3) Use the partnership and transparency between us and the public -- what I called "open-source journalism" for lack of a better name -- to make our journalism better, irrespective of medium.

"Obviously, this was far beyond what JR had asked me to produce. But it didn't faze him; indeed, he immediately made making it all happen my full-time job (albeit with no one to supervise and no budget, for the time being). And so it remains today.

". . . [I]t's possible that this financial pressure will hasten the transition of traditional newspapers to the kind of news operation I envision. But it's more likely that it will simply kill newspapers unable or unwilling to change quickly. I can't say for sure what the ramifications would be for American self-government, but I'm pretty sure you wouldn't like them. "So here's my message for today: We need to change quickly. What do I mean by "quickly"? When I wrote my report almost a year ago, I envisioned a minimum of five years to make the transition. But in light of what has happened in the past year in general and today's news in particular, I now doubt we have even that much time. "The Internet makes our current newspaper business model, with its artificially high profit margins, unsustainable. Companies need to decide, right now, whether they're going to stay in the journalism business or not, understanding that staying in means some significant capital investment right now and, according to everything you were taught in Econ 101, permanently lower profit margins in the long term. "The way I see it, it's a small price to pay for freedom."

Ed Cone was one of this site's earliest citizen bloggers. He now operates his own blog. Cone has been a senior writer at Ziff Davis Media and a free-lancer for a wide variety of magazines and papers, including Wired magazine.

Links

- [Read More](#)
- [Video](#)

Media Giraffe Profile Archive | ID: 119

Created: 2005-06-20 12:27:42

Last Modified: 2007-08-01 16:44:12