

Shrink Rap: Slow News is No News

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When it comes to news, I want it delivered at cyber-speed. And I don't mean by some agonizingly slow dial-up connection. A fat broadband cable — that's what I'm talkin' about.

Dial-up modems are so five years ago that they're now even being ridiculed by children and teenagers, who use the term "dial-up" as slang, to indicate that something is way too slow. As in: "Dad, you're driving at dial-up speed."

Any news that doesn't come to us as it breaks is too slow. And when we're living in a digital world, slow news is no news. Studies have shown that waiting more than a few seconds for a webpage to be rendered is experienced as "too slow." Waiting until tomorrow to read today's headlines?

Forgetaboutit.

If we're demanding news at cyber-speed, is it any wonder the mainstream news media are struggling to stay afloat? Weekly hard-copy news and entertainment magazines, already atrociously dumbed down to the lowest common denominator, watch their readerships continue to dwindle.

Network news programs are scrambling to reinvent themselves, with their own executives admitting their dismal future. At least network TV is still good for taking us live to the scene of breaking news, even if traditional nightly news reports have fallen out of favor. Around the clock cable news has taken its place.

The largest daily print newspapers are forced to adopt periodic face-lifts in an attempt to hold those of us who've grown up with and still enjoy them. More pictures. Bigger, easier to read type. Even graphic (cartoon) depictions of issues may now be found in the op-ed section. If magazines and newspapers didn't have their online versions to supplement their print editions, things would be even worse.

The *Los Angeles Times* announced that their online edition will allow readers an opportunity to alter editorials to reflect their own thinking. Editors are hoping that immediate interaction and feedback is one way to hold their readers.

Nobody likes to mention it in polite society, but journalists, editors and publishers may be found huddled around the fax machine whispering about it. They can sense it coming: Print newspapers will, in the not-so-distant future, be looked upon as relics of the pre-Internet era.

For most of the Internet generation — those 25 and younger — reading newspapers is already irrelevant to their lives. They think Google publishes *The New York Times*. If they want news, they go to Yahoo! or other reliable online sites for up to the minute reports on all news breaking throughout the world.

In 30 years, will children be forced to go to museums to see what a printed newspaper looked like? Like it or not, those of us who like the touch and feel of settling in with a newspaper or magazine are a dying breed. How can print news compete with the immediacy of text-messaging, blogs and PDA's? It can't.

Psychologically, it is another indication of how technology dictates our sense of the pace of our lives. We think we've got to move faster and faster just to stay in the same place. We try to squeeze as many things into the moment as we can.

So, we talk on the cell phone while we're paying the cashier for our latte or turning onto the onramp. We've become experts at dividing our attention in three directions at once. And rather than call it what it is — being scattered — we come up with a fancy sounding term that turns it into a virtue — we're "multi-tasking." Just another byte of our brave new techno/cyber world cookie.

In place of the harried and disjointed feelings that accompany multi-tasking, try focusing on only one task at a time. Act as if there is plenty of time for everything to be attended to — even if you don't believe it. After awhile, you'll notice you're feeling more in control and more present-centered when each task is given your full attention. In addition, the serendipity of single-tasking is that you actually accomplish more and do a better job in the same amount of time.