

NEW REPORTING MODES

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The panorama of reporting is affected by the frenetic evolution of mass media. Communication nowadays represents a crucial avenue for all the social activities, production, education, and entertainment. The increase of Internet access and the empowering of computers renders available new communication modes. Reporters still today are at the center of information flow. Its mediation facilitates increases in numbers of customers by rendering the communication accessible in many ways.

Streaming

A starting step in analyzing the new shapes of information distribution is "streaming". In former times it was necessary to completely unload audio before playing it back. Today, thanks to larger and faster transmission (broadband) and to the higher power of processors, it is possible to listen to a recording on one's own computer while data are still flowing from the remote server. This is "streaming". It is possible to follow directly on the Web audio or video events such as parliamentary discussions, specialized seminars, long-distance lessons, and theatre shows. As an example, the site "www.radioradicale.it" every day transmits--directly or deferred--conventions, interviews, and parliamentary sittings, thus keeping informed an impressive number of persons who otherwise would remain excluded from that information.

Closed captioning

By means of computerized machine shorthand, the text of television transmissions or other public meetings can be shown in realtime for the advantage of hearing-impaired or second-language audiences (such as immigrants). Thanks to well-skilled reporters, these people can access the information in television, at school, in courts, in a theatre, in a church, and so on. Such a service is largely provided in the United States, where skills are generally very high among the professionals providing realtime-specific output. Recently interesting experiences have been carried on in Italy too; for example, the online closed captioning of evening news and other entertainment programs. Subtitling is going to spin in many European countries, since national and European Union laws have stated the necessity of making all efforts to allow the hearing-impaired to access entertainment, culture, and information transmissions. This idea has been strengthened along with the progress of society. It is increasingly imperative that we do not tolerate any person's exclusion from useful information.

Audio/text synchronization

Also, audio/text synchronization is connected to the use and power of the Internet. If we are not able to search in an audio or video file specific sections by keywords, a handicap is created and data are not used effectively. On the other hand, in text files one can search any word and begin reading from that point. The audio/text synchronization gives us the possibility to seek within a video or audio clip the exact

point where one or more words have been pronounced. This is an absolutely revolutionary technology for communication because it allows us to dynamically access audio and video data. As we have seen in dealing with streaming, audio and video formats are going to be used more and more, thanks to the progress of connections to more powerful processors and to the dissemination of the Internet. If your company is concerned with automobiles and is interested in knowing what is being said about that argument in Parliament, you can enter the parliamentarian data bank, indicate your favorite words, and play back the audio or video clip of the speaker who has treated that argument. With the same technique, you can produce a CD-ROM containing video or audio records on the requested issue, and an alert system will email you the advisement that a certain topic has been addressed. There are multiple environments where this technology can apply. I have already named Parliaments. Additionally, citizens, companies, schools, and families will be able to enter data banks for demanding detailed information. Another application of the technology is in courts. The data bank collects the recordings of audiences, which are synchronized with corresponding reports; therefore, debates are completely and exhaustively available. Thus one can search for the exact point when an issue has been discussed. With the audio/text synchronization, an entire course of university lessons can be recorded. Students can listen to what they need or look for the piece when the teacher has explained one topic.

Advantages offered by reporting

The interactive services that the text specialist--the reporter--can provide are many. And many are the advantages spinning from these new reporting methods.

Reporters facilitate the participation of citizens in public life. Unlike in the past, everyone can now get into the Parliament, access needed information on the legislative proceeding, and, finally, express personal political preferences on the basis of one detailed report received directly in-house or in-office. In such a way, reporting empowers the democratic effects of information.

In companies the new reporting services meet a growing demand and concur to produce large savings. Let's consider videoconference reporting, virtual secretaries, hypertext reports of social assemblies, boards of directors, conventions, etc.

At school and at the university, realtime reporting allows participation of hearing-impaired or second-language people. This service by reporters is known as the providing of realtime in the educational setting, and some reporters specialize in this function alone. In long-distance lessons reporters carry out a precious activity with their ability to organize information for keeping up to date various types of users. Audio/text synchronization of lessons and the realization of interactive tools will be highly useful to facilitate the students' activities.

Also from the social point of view, reporting carries out a crucial role. Apart from subtitling, which helps hearing-impaired and foreign people--thus opening information to new categories of customers--by means of streaming and other online services, bands normally excluded from the so-called "global village" are finally caught up. Anyone can simply acquire requested information and dynamically use it; therefore, a

substantial parity of opportunities comes true in a context that exceeds national borders and embraces the planetary network.

New strategies and competencies

The reporting revolution and the new opportunities have as a consequence new shapes of presentation of services. Techniques and--above all--times must adapt themselves to the new requirements. The reporter becomes an expert of communication and knows the techniques in order to facilitate the flow of information according to the customers' needs and demands. Reporting is therefore in the center of a multidirectional scenario of processing communication. The report as traditionally known represents only the first ring of an open chain of possibilities. It's the key for the start of a complex product which will continue to inform customers who would benefit for culture, interest, and need. For such reasons, reporters must ensure the maximum flexibility, comprehensiveness, and interactivity. Therefore, it's necessary to improve traditional competencies of reporters and, if needed, to add the new skills required by the changed professional path.

Education

The education of staff employed in reporting services is a crucial passage.

From the technical point of view, they must increase their shorthand speed and accuracy and must improve their language abilities in order to be able to provide useful realtime performance--for example, in the captioning field.

Voice reporting should be learned too, with great patience and seriousness, being aware that it's necessary to conscientiously chase and support excellence--not simply to switch tools without an eye toward creating an improved product--if we desire to supply new services. It's important to be respectful of times and programs of training to obtain the adequate performance of speech-recognition software.

Furthermore, technological acquaintances must be acknowledged, particularly the advantages offered from the use of the Internet or the power of a telecommunications net, which are still less than fully explored spaces where the reporters can find important opportunities if they have a serious approach consisting of humility and will. It's time to start a new professional era based upon the constant upgrading of acquaintances, technological innovation, research, and planning of new multimedia products. Only in this way will we be able to accept and utilize fully the opportunities the market is offering to us.

Associations

For such aims, associative experiences such as those offered through INTERSTENO are of fundamental relief. Our Association represents the point of reference for all reporters and facilitates the renewal of the profession, giving evidence to best practices and to the advances of reporting techniques.

As a matter of fact, let me recall an important Italian experience. FENIR is an Association which gathers reporting companies in Italy. Its activity has gone far beyond

the trade-union dimension. FENIR represents a body of reference for public strategies in justice management and can display its network in the project of justice innovation by means of introducing new software such as the "electronic package" and more multimedia items. This is an example of how, if we work seriously and co-operatively, reporting can embrace new opportunities, achieve impressive greatness, and become truly indispensable to the public.

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