ACES
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Online editing session
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We are in the middle of a revolution that is going to continue to have a dramatic effect both on the way we edit, and on the skills we need to bring to the table.

Before becoming a member of the Online News Desk three years ago, I didn't really know what a CMS was. I wasn't sure what aggregation meant.

I didn't know how to insert a video or crop and insert a photo, or SEO a headline, or switch to code mode to insert a related links box, or check Site Catalyst to see what was most interesting to our readers today.

And the thought of posting news from another media outlet on our web site was anathema to me.

My sense of deadline was intimately tied to a manufacturing process that was leisurely during the day, and peaked late at night, as giant presses roared to life. It was *not* tied to a bell curve of news consumers whose interest springs to life in the morning, peaks at noon, and then tails off into the evening.

Now, I am never on deadline. And I am always on deadline.

As a newspaper copy editor almost all my professional life, for the first time I am in the real-time, post-it-now, beat-your-competition, minutes-count, breaking news business, and it's exhilarating.

Now, like all newsrooms around the country, we are in the middle of revolutionary change. And many of those changes strike at the heart of how we see ourselves as copy editors and our role in the newsroom. So there is resistance, much of it in my view futile.

In our own newsroom, there are many levels of editing that occur on online stories, ranging from very thorough to not at all, at least in the initial postings. For highly competitive local breaking news, we practice the once-heinous idea of post-then-edit. Does this sometimes mean typos appear on the site? Yes, it does. Has it resulted in major errors being posted to the site? In my experience, not at all. In most cases, knowing that their work will go out to the world before an editor looks at it makes reporters very careful about their initial three-paragraph take on what is going on.

It is an undeniable reality of our business in the 21st century that more content makes its way to our audience with less editing than at any time in our history. It's a reality we have to contend with.

But along with that, there are other things true about the internet that I have learned in the past three years.

1. The internet is impermanent.
My first instinct when I see an error online is to have the same reaction that I had when I was the copy desk chief or page1 editor: Horror. But then I remember that I can fix that mistake in seconds, and that the number of people on the site looking at a single story in any five-minute period is relatively small compared to the entire audience.

2. People have different expectations for online versus print.
In the online world, people expect their breaking news fast and in increments. In my experience, in this environment they are highly tolerant of minor errors. It doesn't mean we shouldn't do everything we can to correct them as soon as possible. But it does mean that we shouldn't let the chance of minor error keep us from the timely posting of breaking news.

3. Mistakes = opportunities for engagement
Readers really enjoy pointing out our errors. Some more than others. But most do so politely. We view these moments as an opportunity to go into the comment streams and just say, hey, thanks for catching that. We fixed it. We even see instances where in breaking news, if someone complains too loudly, the community will come to the defense of the idea of posting quickly, then correcting on the fly.

So I think it's a really challenging time to be a copy editor. We're still extremely important in the flow of news. It's still important to refine and perfect even the copy that is already live online. But it's important to develop a whole new set of skills.

And the one thing I know for sure in this changing environment is that more change is coming, and it's coming faster than any of us think.