

Bart Richards Award for Media Criticism

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To Whom It May Concern:

Media coverage is no longer simply about tracking the behavior of media outlets.

Challenges to U.S. media were turbocharged in 2022 by the rapid spread of digital economics into a world that continues to cling to legacy methodology. I spent a good part of last year chronicling how the rush to keep up with technology has forced extreme changes in traditional newsgathering models, with expert companies and executives finding themselves whipsawed by the struggle to keep pace.

The result? Three stories that showed different examples of how the rapid transformation of the news and information industries is giving rise to chaos.

A prime example is the recent shift in direction at MSNBC. Last Spring, I learned from several sources that MSNBC was pursuing a different editorial tack, pulling back in some cases from hard news reports in favor of opinion and analysis through a progressive lens. Editorial staffers were still prepared to cover the news, but the way corporate owner NBC Universal was re-organizing itself meant that sort of coverage was being earmarked for other outlets under the company's umbrella. As I wrote in the story, "The moves show how quickly the business of streaming is reworking some of the most traditional parts of news operations."

The media industry is also scrambling to tackle disinformation and conspiracy theories, and even Madison Avenue is getting involved. Operating with the theory that blue-chip advertisers do not want to put their glitzy pitches alongside bad facts, one large agency has hired a start-up journalism firm with a mission to provide "nutrition labels" for mainstream news products – including some of the nation's best-known TV news programs. If the company's efforts gain momentum, news networks may come under new pressures if they want to keep ad dollars flowing. The dynamic has some in the business worried about how much influence advertisers could then have over news product.

Finally, earlier this year I examined the prospects for CNN just as its then-parent AT&T was about to sell WarnerMedia to Discovery. All signs pointed to a radical "reset" for CNN, which had made a new name for itself as a place for passionate delivery and examination of the nation's politics. The story proved prescient: CNN looks nothing like its recent self, and there are significant doubts its fortunes can improve.

These stories offer thoughtful, sometimes provocative looks inside the business of news and media. They rely on a longtime beat reporter's deep knowledge of the industry and how it works, expert sourcing, and actionable insight – elements that are often in less abundance in coverage of a flashy and

fast-moving sector. I hope you will consider them for the Bart Richards Award for Media Criticism, and I appreciate your time and review.

All best

Brian Steinberg