

Opening Address

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Welcome to the Third Conference on Innovation Journalism at Stanford. The conference is growing each year. We are making excellent progress.

This year Vint Cerf, AKA “Father of the Internet”—recruited by Google as “Chief Internet Evangelist”—opens the proceedings, the first time a news professional won’t open the conference. It’s appropriate, with radical changes spurred by the Internet that are affecting the news industry.

Until now, the web played second fiddle to paper in mainstream news. This is changing—the tipping point is here. We face drastic and accelerating changes: large publishing houses are being sold, big news rooms are being stripped, weekly magazines are going monthly—while their websites generate news hourly. Journalists are losing jobs they thought were safe. But, as in earlier industrial revolutions, new jobs will emerge.

The Internet offers not only paperless distribution but also a new medium for creating widespread awareness in new and old public sectors and readerships that will redefine the news industry in many ways, many unguessable.

Journalism seeks readership attention and sells it to advertisers. Advertisers want to know what their money delivers. Publishers profile readerships, measure their publication’s penetration, then use the statistics to explain to advertisers what they are paying for. New Web tools, even free stuff for private blogs, reveal amazing potential. Statistics show which stories were downloaded, when, how long a reader stayed, where he or she lived, and so on. Every incident is registered and analyzed. Advertisers know exactly how much attention their ad gets. Such information will never be available for news on paper. Paying for trees to be murdered while not getting that readership information will be hard to sell to shareholders in future.

Web publishing has lower capital investment and margin costs. In news organisations, both drivers and controllers have incentives to move to the Internet and away from paper. It is no longer exotic to publish news on the Web—the question is not whether to publish on the Web, but whether the particular news story should be on paper at all.

There are other reasons why the tipping point is here. I won’t explore them now. The bottom line: newspaper publishing has been a well-defined practice for over a hundred years but lacked R&D—it wasn’t needed. After listening to Vint Cerf, I think you’ll

agree that news media will be transformed from a conservative into an R&D-intensive industry.

Let us move from innovations in journalism to journalism about innovations.

Today we live with constant innovation and change. Journalism must embrace and cover innovation. This is difficult—innovation processes are multidisciplinary. Traditional journalism struggles with innovation. Traditional beats—technology, business, politics—chop up innovation processes to fit established news slots, missing the bigger picture.

Our conference will focus on how journalism can report innovation, via four main themes: ‘Innovation Journalism,’ ‘Innovation Communication,’ ‘National Initiatives for Innovation Journalism’ and ‘The Role of Journalism in Innovation Systems.’ We will address issues from how to report on innovation to spreading that knowledge, and how reporting on innovation helps and interests society.

In democracies and innovation economies, competitors form alliances, establish compromise, trigger conflicts. Winners in democracies implement societal ideas; innovation winners implement and sell their ideas. Journalists cover the interaction between the key influencers, their ideas, their conflicts, their technologies, their organizations, and more. They target and win readerships. Advertisers respond. The circle is complete.

Innovation Journalism can help society by developing ‘clusters’ and innovation ‘ecosystems,’ reporting on key issues and events for all involved. It can help shift leaders’ mindsets and increase the competitiveness of innovation communities. To achieve this, journalists must identify readership clusters, determine the principals and key issues, attract audience attention, find advertisers to sell to or invent new business models. These skills do not come by themselves. Journalism is a conservative industry with few R&D resources. This opens the field for external funding—venture capital, foundations or research funding agencies. The issue needs a community and that’s why we are here. Our program goal is to co-develop the concept and the community of Innovation Journalism.

In 1999, Vint, I and others in the Internet Society were discussing the Internet’s major societal effects. The Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF) shapes Internet technical standards, like email and web protocols. We proposed a similar task force on society’s use of the Internet, a forum for best practices, standards and regulations. We tested the idea but the Internet pros were busy trying to become millionaires while the public policy people were still too inexperienced. Good Innovation Journalism will work similarly, a feedback mechanism for innovations in society.

Thank you all for coming, especially those who travelled from other countries.