

## **A N Smith Lecture in Journalism**

**The University of Melbourne**

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### **Do newspapers have a future? And how long is that future?**

**Michael Gawenda**

Thank you all for coming and thank you Vice Chancellor Glyn Davis for asking me to give this lecture. I am in the company of some very distinguished people who have given the A.N. Smith lecture in the past. I hope I can be somewhere near as interesting and provocative as some of them were.

I want to start with a couple of quotes from dead old white men, a demographic I am bound, sooner or later, to join. That's my future taken care of. I state the obvious of course, but do so because how journalists and editors like me regard the future of newspapers depends on how much of a future we ourselves have--in newspapers and in life.

Most these quotes come from books and articles I have not read. They are quotes I have found by using the Google search engine. The Google search engine has now become a widespread research tool in journalism. The effects are not always benign. Still, I have, at times, succumbed to its seductiveness.

In 1961, the American playwright Arthur Miller said: 'A good newspaper, I suppose, is a nation talking to itself.' I think that with a small edit, the sort a sub-editor of a certain type could easily perform, this Miller attempt at wisdom about newspapers could have said something that would be as true today as it would have been almost a half century ago : 'A bad newspaper, I suppose, is a newspaper talking to itself'. The truth is, no newspaper in a democracy has ever been 'a nation talking to itself'

As the American writer Joseph Epstein argued in an article published in Commentary magazine in 2006, 'the paper to which you subscribed...told a good deal about your family- its social class, its level of education, its politics'. Epstein

was talking about the 1950s and 1960s, when newspapers were king, when people like his father—and when I come to think of it, my father—would pour over their daily paper late into the night. Mostly, during that era when newspapers were king, newspapers were a masculine thing—journalists were overwhelmingly male and overwhelmingly wrote for a male readership.

At least that's who they thought was their readership.

In 1970, when I started at the Age, female journalists were still, in the main, fenced off—literally—in a section of the newsroom that produced the daily women's pages which focused on fashion, recipes and how to be a good wife and mother. The rise of Michelle Grattan and others like her was still a few years off.

So Arthur Miller, great playwright that he was, got it wrong about what made a good newspaper. Forget this nation talking to itself stuff. In their heyday, newspaper readers and newspaper journalists were predominantly men talking to other men, with readership fragmented by class, education and to a certain extent, political orientation.

Here's another quote, this one from the philosopher George Santayana who in 1915 wrote to his sister about the influence of newspapers: "When I read them, I form perhaps a new opinion of the newspaper but seldom a new opinion on the subject discussed."

This strikes me as a particularly apt encapsulation of the position still taken by many of those who consider themselves well educated and well versed in the affairs of the world—the so-called elites in other words.

The only newspaper of quality is one which more or less confirms them in the rightness of their version of the truth. One of the few firm conclusions I reached about newspapers from my time as editor of The Age, was that when public intellectuals and opinion leaders talked about quality journalism, they had in mind journalism that reflected their reality and their truth.

To some extent, they are no different really—only more so-- from most newspaper readers over the decades who considered themselves defined in certain fundamental ways by the newspaper—or newspapers—they bought and read.

I don't think this sort of relationship, this sort of self-definition, will ever be the case with news websites or blog sites.

The relationship between a newspaper and its readers is an intimate one. For readers, their response to their newspaper is determined by the paper's character and personality, its consistency, its humor and quirkiness and its endearing foibles. It is a relationship that develops over time.

The idea that a good newspaper is a nation talking to itself may be questionable, but a good newspaper does have a community of readers who feel connected to each other through the newspaper they welcome into their homes and their workplaces. In that sense, newspapers are civic institutions and our civic life would be much the poorer if they ceased to exist.

It is already poorer because there are fewer newspapers than there were in the past –and there will be fewer still in the not too distant future.

And newspaper ownership in Australia and elsewhere is increasingly concentrated. This inevitably means that there are more and more people who are confronted with this choice: either they accept into their lives a newspaper for which they have no affection or great regard, or they give up reading newspapers.

George Santayana is perhaps best known not for his quote about newspapers, but, among those of us whose research is mostly web-based, for this pithy line: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it". This presupposes that the past is invariably not worth repeating. I don't know about that. I know many journalists, for instance, who would love to repeat the past, go back to what they think was some golden age of newspapers and journalism, when editor-gods roamed the news rooms dispensing the KNOWLEDGE. But a return to the past is most unlikely, whether or not you remember it.

It is therefore with some trepidation that I ask you to indulge me a little as I remember the past without, I hope, too much nostalgia. Here's a quote from an old white man who is still alive, according to Wikipedia, the online source of much factual information used by some journalists. Some of these facts have proven to be fiction.

Jack Gremond, whose 50 years of newspaper reporting apparently has made him a legend of his craft in the US—though I know next to nothing of his work -- once said, according to my Google search, that writing a newspaper editorial was like wetting oneself while wearing a dark blue suit: “It gives you a warm feeling but nobody notices”.

This is a sentiment that many reporters of a certain type and time would relate to. These reporters went to mid-week race meetings, liked a beer and could be found late in the day in the public bar of a hotel near their newspaper.

There, they drank with disreputable people, some of whom were police officers, some of whom were criminals and some of whom were both. Editorial writing was something akin to death, to be avoided as long as all possible.

This was a reporting culture that predominated when I first became a journalist. It was a newspaper culture of course, for this was a time when no-one asked questions like the ones I am meant to be addressing today. Reporters, even many of them on a broadsheet like *The Age*, seemed to me to have modeled themselves on Damon Runyon, the American writer and columnist whose heyday was in the decades before World War Two.

Runyon brought to his readers a world of shady characters they would never actually encounter in their own lives but who fascinated and intrigued them, characters who came to define parts of New York because of Runyon’s reporting and writing skills.

When I started at *The Age*, journalists were not –and did not consider themselves to be--professionals. The vast majority had no tertiary education. But many of them were autodidacts, better and more widely read than the vast majority of university graduates who subsequently flooded into newspapers and transformed newspaper culture.

Many of them led shambolic lives. They were poorly paid, a fact that they proclaimed as a sort of badge of honor. Many of them could drink prodigious amounts and still write like a dream on deadline, often late at night, having returned to the office after a day of rummaging around their city and its haunts. They did so in order to bring to their readers stories that formed, in the newspaper

for which they worked, a daily narrative of the city's life and its people, from the powerful to the powerless.

They rummaged around in Canberra as well and in the countryside and if they were lucky, they rummaged around in New York and London as well. The Age and the Sun News Pictorial and the afternoon Herald were rooted in Melbourne, part of the city's fabric, each of them serving a community of readers. I cannot recall much talk back then about journalistic ethics or about objectivity.

Or about quality journalism for that matter.

There was a confidence in those news rooms about journalism and about newspapers that is no-longer there. There was whining and bitching and morale was always at rock bottom – most journalists are moody, often depressive bastards—but there was a collective pride in the paper.

It was there at The Age where I started and later at The Sun News Pictorial where I worked with and learnt to report, from people like Laurie Oakes who you all know and others who you don't, like John Fraser and Bruce Wilson and John Murphy and Ralph Broom and Geoffrey Wright, reporters who I am glad I can honor by referring to them by name here tonight.

Mind you, for all the changes over the past three decades in journalism-- its elevated status as a profession, its ferociously bright, well educated and non-alcoholic practitioners, close to a majority of whom are now women, with most on salaries that the old reporters who were my role models never even dreamt of earning--Jack Gremond's likening of editorial writing to pissing yourself while wearing a dark blue suit still rings true about some newspapers.

But for different reasons.

When I first started at The Age, the editorial writers sat in a glassed off space to the side of the newsroom. There were six men, I think—there were no women editorial writers until the late Pamela Bone breached that glass ceiling at The Age—and to me and many of my wet behind the ears peers, they were the voice of The Age.

Each day, for an hour or so, they would engage in serious debate and consultation with the editor. I would sometimes walk past the editor's office just to catch a glimpse of the animated conversation.

Then, after a suitable period of deep thought and some research, after taking account of the paper's history on any particular issue, and most often after a well lubricated lunch at the local pub, they would offer up to our community of readers a thoughtful-- and often thought-provoking-view on the issues of the day.

These editorials were written with a tone of confidence, confidence that readers wanted and expected the paper to take positions on matters that mattered to them and their community.

In a sense, editorials were an expression of confidence in the role of newspapers and their relationship with their readers.

On the eve of the federal election last November, The Age ran an election editorial that encapsulated for me the fact that some newspapers are unsure of their role and deeply unsure about their future.

In summary, the editorial stated that The Age would not make a judgment on whether the Coalition or Labor ought to form the next Government. It would not make that judgment because, the editorial stated, the paper did not believe its role was to tell readers how to vote.

In my view, this revealed a fundamental misunderstanding of the role of editorials and an even more fundamental misunderstanding of the relationship between a newspaper and its readers. To me it represented a sort of surrender. By the way, the Sydney Morning Herald did editorialise in favor of a change of government last November, but this was despite the fact that a day before the 2004 election, the paper—under a now departed editor-- had published an editorial which said that the Sydney Morning Herald would not reveal its view on whether the Coalition or the Labor Party should form the next government and what's more, would never again publish an election editorial that expressed such an opinion.

How, I wondered at the time, could Fairfax management have allowed such nonsense that committed one of its great papers to never again, publish an election editorial that actually had something to say. This tells you something about the

confusion and lack of confidence at Fairfax about newspapers –about what they are, about their history and fundamentally, about a newspaper’s relationship with its readers.

A few weeks ago Rupert Murdoch’s New York Post published a front page editorial declaring the paper’s support for John McCain. I know this because it was fairly widely reported, as if the Post editorial was legitimate news, that it mattered. It did in my view.

The reasons might be debated, but one reason why it mattered was because Rupert Murdoch believes editorials matter. He believes newspapers matter. Whatever may be said of Murdoch, it cannot be said that his love of newspapers is feigned and it cannot be said about him that he knows little about their history. It cannot be said about him that he has no view about what makes a good newspaper. And it cannot be said that his newspapers have about them an air of doom, as if their death is fast approaching.

It is a reflection on the state of newspapers in Australia --and elsewhere to a certain extent, including the US—that many media executives and journalists, in the words of Mark Scott, the ABC Managing Director and former senior executive at Fairfax, believe that ‘the last best hope for newspapers is Rupert Murdoch’.

Here’s a quote from an old—well aging anyway—white male. In a short speech he gave recently to a conference of the Pacific Area Newspaper Publishers’ Association, Kevin Rudd worried about the future of quality journalism at a time when newspapers are in decline and the media landscape is rapidly changing.

‘‘But (this changing media landscape) that doesn’t mean abandoning quality journalism or quality ideas or quality debate’’, he said. ‘‘. I believe today there is even greater demand. And that’s because our communities, both local and global, are tired of the same old political script.’’

Now where is the evidence to support Rudd’s claim that he has a real passion for quality journalism, quality ideas and quality debate? Surely it can’t be the Labor election campaign last November, which was widely regarded in political circles as a great success.

Much of that success was attributed to Rudd's iron discipline and ability to stay on message no matter what the provocation from journalists, to actually say something meaningful, something that had not been focus group tested.

And, I would argue, that the Rudd Government, in its first year in office, has been as much concerned with managing the so-called 24/7 news cycle as its predecessor. Managing the 24/7 news cycle has nothing to do with quality journalism and quality ideas and quality debate. In truth, it is about avoiding these things.

The more talk there is about the need for quality journalism for instance, the more I am convinced that those who talk about it, commit themselves and their papers to it and express their love for it, the more I am certain that they have no idea what it is they are talking about.

George Orwell, perhaps the greatest English language reporter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century—I say reporter because it was his reporting that I believe was his best work—taught us that language matters. During the seven years that I edited *The Age*, journalism became content, reporters became content providers, the newspaper became a content platform—one among many of course—and editors were invariably referred to as managers. There were power point presentations to staff by senior executives at which this sort of language was inadvertently hilarious.

In one memorable instance, journalism was represented as a content egg—where was the chicken I wondered?—that could be sliced and diced and made into content suitable for different delivery platforms—curried egg for the internet, scrambled egg for mobile phones, soft boiled egg for the newspaper. Or hard boiled if that's your preference.

Editors became middle managers or if you like the content egg metaphor, short order chefs, with the journalists as kitchen hands—or should that be battery hens?

Fairfax was not the only newspaper company, at which senior management and the company board-- on which, invariably, there sat not a single person with newspaper experience-- to junk the history and the traditions of newspapers and journalism, by reducing journalism and reporting to content, editors to factory



floor middle managers, and journalists to content providers, but it was one of the first to do so, certainly in Australia.

While all the while, publicly, board members and senior managers proclaimed their commitment to quality journalism. And obsessed over the share price and what the next lot of prophecy from media analysts might mean for their futures.

And so I come to the question, head on. Do newspapers have a future? I hope so. How long is that future? Well your guess is as good as mine. I know that by examining the trends in circulation and readership --and the profitability--of American newspapers over the past few decades and extrapolating forward, the media writer Philip Myer in his book *The Vanishing Newspaper*, concluded that the last American newspaper will be published in the first quarter of 2043. I know that Roy Greenslade, a former editor of the UK Daily Mirror and the Guardian's media critic, told a conference in Sydney earlier this year on the future of journalism, that in the not too distant future, most newspapers will have died and that what will remain, is perhaps a couple of national papers—if we are lucky—for an already 'information-rich' readership. I know that Eric Beecher, the publisher of Crikey and a former Editor of the Sydney Morning Herald and the now vanished Melbourne Herald, someone who has thought as deeply and creatively about this question as anyone I know, has concluded that most newspapers do not have a future and that perhaps the best hope for the sort of journalism that newspapers like the Fairfax broadsheets were once committed to, might be for the Federal Government to increase funding for journalism to the ABC—because he cannot envisage a commercial business model for such journalism.

There is something about this doom and gloom from aging journalists and former editors who have had wonderful experiences on newspapers that is irritating. I imagine this is particularly irritating for young journalists just starting out, perhaps on some suburban or country paper and dreaming of one day making it on to The Age or The Herald Sun or The Sydney Morning Herald or The Australian. Not to mention the hundreds, no thousands of journalism students at Australian universities who are being told there will be no newspapers for them to go to when they have completed their degrees.

I know that the logic of doom and gloom is compelling. I see no point here re-hashing in great detail the evidence for the eventual demise, sooner or later, of newspapers. So let me quickly encapsulate that evidence. Newspaper circulation and readership across much of the English-speaking world, has been declining for decades and that the decline, especially in the United States, has, dramatically accelerated over the past few years.

There have been many reasons advanced for this decline, including social and political change, changes in work and family patterns, technological change, including the development of the world-wide web. At the same time, classified advertising, the advertising that Rupert Murdoch once labeled the rivers of gold, started migrating to web sites about a decade or so ago and that migration too has accelerated recently –and is continuing to accelerate.

Many of the world's most profitable newspapers, including The Age and The Sydney Morning Herald, basically ran two businesses. The classifieds business was highly profitable in part because these papers had a monopoly on this form of advertising and so could jack up the price regularly knowing that there was nowhere else for the advertisers to go.

The classified sections of papers like The Age and The Sydney Morning Herald ran to hundreds of pages. Go back three decades and have a look at Saturday editions of these papers. They were huge while the editorial space, the space for journalism, was miniscule. These papers sold close to 100,000 extra copies on Saturday and I can tell you it wasn't because of the journalism!

So the classified business was a gold mine. What about the journalism business? How did that stack up in terms of profitability? Well the fact is that the weekday papers that carried few classified sections were never particularly profitable. They certainly were nowhere near profitable enough to sustain a staff of hundreds of journalists and continue to deliver the sort of results that had made newspaper companies with classified monopolies among the most profitable businesses in the world.

When I was appointed Editor of The Age in 1997, the internet loomed on the horizon and the threat that this thing had the potential to seriously damage the paper's classified business was becoming increasingly clear. I cannot recall much

concern about what it might do to newspaper journalism, even though its effects were already being felt in the United States and to a lesser extent, Britain.

But in the last few years of my time as editor, there was increasing awareness that newspapers were under threat and had to change. I do not want to go into detail here of what happened next except to say that Fairfax lost its classified monopoly and it failed to come up with a business model that took advantage of its long-time grip on classifieds.

Its online classified sites were...well... disappointing: the perfunctory attempts to link the online Fairfax classified sites to the classified sections in the papers went nowhere. Few understood the strength of the Fairfax masthead for few knew and understood the history of these papers.

At the same time, I believe that the senior management at Fairfax and the Fairfax board lost confidence in the company's newspapers. The implicit—and sometimes explicit—message was that these managers and these board members did not really see a future for these papers.

At least not a future they could articulate. They were often bemused, in my view, about what it was exactly that journalists did. They were bemused --and disconcerted-- by passion for newspapers from editors and journalists and even readers.

They were bemused sometimes by the fact that they were running a newspaper company.

At a time of transition and great challenges for newspapers, Fairfax—and this was true for other newspaper companies as well, including the Los Angeles Times for instance-- was run by people who had no experience of the business, no knowledge of its history and role in the communities in which their newspapers operated and what's more, no great love of them.

Do newspapers have a future? In this process of decline of newspapers, the United States is probably three or four years ahead of Australia. In the main, newspaper companies in America have reacted to declining circulation and readership, and declining profitability, by cutting costs.

Specifically by cutting editorial staff. The most savage cuts have been on the chain owned newspapers which is really most of them. Most of this cutting has been savage. The San Francisco Chronicle, for instance, has lost more than a third of its staff. It has no foreign correspondents and a miniscule staff in Washington—most of its Washington coverage comes from a bureau that services a dozen or more newspapers across the country. I must say that the San Francisco Chronicle is now a pretty ordinary paper. No wonder its circulation is in free-fall.

The same is true of other papers that were once—if not great—then pretty good, papers like the Philadelphia Inquirer and the Baltimore Sun and the Chicago Tribune and the Los Angeles Times which was once considered among the top three or four papers in the United States. These are now very ordinary papers, with no foreign correspondents and no real presence in Washington. Some of their best journalists have left, which is often the way of these things when voluntary redundancies are on offer.

The role models are disappearing and the history of these papers is being wiped out. And all the while, the senior management and the boards of these papers talk endlessly about their commitment to quality journalism.

Let me commend to you an article in the March edition of Esquire magazine by David Simon, the creator of *The Wire*, perhaps the best television series of recent years, which is set in Baltimore and which examines life in that city's black ghetto. It is a magnificent work which calls to mind the novels of Charles Dickens, full of unforgettable characters. It gives us a portrait of a decaying American city at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century that in my view, matches Dickens' portrayal of London in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Simon was a reporter on the Baltimore Sun for 13 years before he was encouraged to take a redundancy by the paper's editor. His beat was mostly the Baltimore Police Department. Simon was a truly great reporter. The Esquire piece is an angry lament for the paper he once loved but which is no more. It ends like this:

“The other day I saw a column of smoke dust east of the I-95 just above Eastern Avenue—dark and thick enough that I drive there. It was a roadside car fire, no

injuries. Nothing worth a call to the desk. Good thing too...because who was I going to call it in to? I have no clue'.

There is incessant chatter about the need for a new model for newspapers in the digital age, which might be true, but in the meantime, the newspapers, which are still profitable, are being butchered and the talk of a new model is nothing really but empty words.

It is in this context that I have to say that the editorial cuts announced by Fairfax recently were chilling. The cuts were in response to a dramatic fall in advertising revenue, most of it in classified revenue. The economic slowdown is the immediate cause, but this was coming for at least a decade.

It is in the context of my experience as an editor at Fairfax and my experience of newspapers in the United States when I was based in Washington, that I say that it is a failure of imagination and commitment, a result of a lack of experience and knowledge and love of newspapers, that Fairfax is going down the slash and burn path. This is a path tried by newspapers in other places, a path that has led to even more rapid declines in circulation and readership and ultimately, profitability.

Don't they know that?

I am not opposed to cuts in editorial staff as a matter of principle. I do not believe that every job has to be preserved and protected. I am not even saying that The Sydney Morning Herald and The Age cannot be great newspapers with fewer journalists. They can. And they have to change. But for real change, courage is needed and vision and risk-taking and above all, a commitment to newspapers and journalism that, frankly, I do not see at the moment.

Do the editors of The Sydney Morning Herald and The Age have a voice at senior management level, about the future of the papers they edit?

I doubt it.

Were they asked to come up with a plan for a different sort of newspaper, one that would take account of the fact that some reporting is better done online?

I doubt it.

I understand that the editors of The Age and The Sydney Morning Herald have no say and no control over their papers' websites. This is ridiculous. All the talk of newsroom integration is rendered meaningless as a result. With this structure, how will it ever be possible to come up with a model that integrates the newspaper with its online site so that both have a future?

Already the online newspaper sites of the main Fairfax metropolitan mastheads are at odds with what those mastheads long stood for. They are much more popular, much more celebrity and entertainment focused. This in my view is a recipe for disaster. The mastheads, in my view, are being trashed.

Before these cuts were announced, were the editors asked what the effect would be on the papers they edited?

I doubt it.

There is no plan. Nothing any of the senior managers at Fairfax have said suggests I am wrong about this. Indeed, I would guess that they have no idea what the future holds and have no real idea about how to shape it. And so the editors of these papers work in a sort of vacuum, in which they are asked to cut staff but are unable to re-assure anyone that they—or the paper—has a future. They are even unable to re-assure their staff that they, the editors, have a real say at senior management level, in the big decisions that are being made that will determine whether—and for how long—these newspapers survive.

At the Los Angeles Times, three editors and two publishers have resigned in recent years because they were unwilling to implement further staff cuts. They said they couldn't see how they could produce a paper that their readers expected with cuts like these—up to a third of their staff.

There is no plan at the Los Angeles Times except a plan to slash and burn.

I said at the start of this lecture that how people like me, former editors and aging journalists, regard the future of newspapers is in part determined by the fact that our future in newspapers is rather limited. Mostly, our future is in the past. But I do believe that all these young men and women, embarking on a career in journalism and still dreaming of a job on one of our metropolitan papers, should not despair. Things change, often in unexpected and unforeseeable ways. I believe

there are some things newspapers can do that no other medium can match—not television, not radio, not the internet.

One of the great mistakes newspapers have made in recent years is that they have tried to address their weaknesses rather than build on their strengths. So we have shorter stories, bigger headlines, more graphics, more bells and whistles, more tricked up, overblown pages, more and more pages that are meant to look visually rich, but in the main, look desperate and garish.

And this attempt to ape the internet in print is being driven by middle aged people who in truth, have no real feel for the net and therefore no real understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. I believe that the next generation of journalists, who have grown up in the digital age, are much more likely to understand what newspapers can offer that digitally delivered journalism cannot offer.

What might these things be? Only newspapers can build a community of readers. What builds that community? Well for a start, a shared sense of what the newspaper is about, what it considers important and interesting and entertaining and thought-provoking. A shared sense of the city and the country and even the world. And that's about telling stories— stories from our courts and our police force and our local councils and our businesses and our governments and our hospitals. You get the drift. No web-based news site will ever tell such stories. No news site will ever give people what David Simon gave them in the Baltimore Sun when he spent a year with the city's homicide squad and wrote about it in paper, articles which later became a book and then a terrific television series—Homicide, Life On The Streets.

Is this investigative journalism? Of course it is. How many articles do you find in your paper which you consider compelling and revelatory, articles that only a reporter, going out there and doing the reporting work, could have brought you? Newspapers need to be in the business of news, but they need to report news that only a newspaper can do well.

The rest, reports of news conferences, PR driven events, announcements—all of that can go online. Newspapers need to get smaller, clearer in their focus.

Most of the lifestyle sections should migrate to online. That doesn't mean newspapers should stop writing about food, for instance, but think, when was last

time you read a truly well reported story about food? The reviews and the listings are much better done on line. That's true for entertainment and television guides as well.

Unlike some people, I believe the future for newspapers is not in commentary and analysis. Newspaper must not become what The Independent in the UK has become—in the phrase used by its current editor, a 'viewspaper'. The internet is awash with commentary. You can read the columnists on every major—and minor-- paper in Australia and around the world on the net and you don't even have to go to the websites of these papers—there are a number of sites that aggregate this stuff. Cable news is full of commentators, mostly shouting at each other.

This is not to say that newspapers should abandon commentary and analysis. But commentary should really be just another form of reporting—tell me something I have not thought about. That can only be done by people who know more about a given subject than I know. Too many columnists actually know less than their readers.

Newspapers need to build on their strengths. Forget big headlines and huge and often meaningless graphics and photographs obscured by having print plastered all over them. More photographs, yes, but with a premium on arresting photography—something the net cannot do well. Great photographs and illustrations and wonderful editorial cartoons—we can produce all that if we put our minds to it.

And stories, well-written and compelling stories, well edited and with headlines that are smart and if possible, entertaining, but please, no lousy puns which it seems to me have now become the standard newspaper headline in some places.

Will this work? Do we have the sort of talent needed to produce such a newspaper?

Will this sort of newspaper, half the size of most of the papers we produce today succeed?



Can newspapers have smaller circulations and fewer readers, a premium cover price, no lifestyle sections, no special circulation deals -which basically involve giving the paper away- and be profitable?

I think so.

What size staff is required to produce such a newspaper? I suspect a smaller staff than the staff producing today's papers. I am sure that the newspaper and the online sites of the newspaper need to be brought together because without that sort of integration, neither will succeed.

Do newspapers have a future? And how long is that future? Well, I ask you to imagine Melbourne without The Age and the Herald Sun or Sydney without The Sydney Morning Herald and the Daily Telegraph. Imagine Australia without The Australian. If you can imagine such a future, in my view, that's in part because of our failure to produce newspapers which attract the sort of fierce and life-long loyalty they once attracted.

If I might just end with a piece of gratuitous advice to my fellow reporters, young and not so young, in whose hands the future of newspapers, to a certain extent rests: stop Googling and get out there and talk to people in your city. There are no real stories in your newsrooms. Read a lot—papers and magazines and books. I don't see how you can be a great reporter and writer if you don't read great reporting and writing.

You, especially you younger ones, can give newspapers a future. Always remember what a great privilege it is that you can approach perfect strangers and ask them to tell you about their lives and why they are doing certain things. If you go after stories with that in mind, the ghosts of some of Australia's greatest newspaper reporters will be there with you.