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<th><strong>Title</strong></th>
<th>Training journalists for the information age</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Author(s)</strong></td>
<td>M. A. Razman.</td>
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Training Journalists For The Information Age

By

M A Razman
Trends in the Media: Implications for Education and Training

TRAINING JOURNALISTS FOR THE INFORMATION AGE

By M.A. Razman, Manager, Editorial Training, New Straits Times Sdn Bhd

1. Coping with the Information Explosion

The information explosion has led to the emergence of a new kind of news consumer -- the scanner. He does not have time to read, watch or listen to all the news available.

But for the media, there is a different kind of information explosion -- the sheer bulk of information available in new, highly specialised and technologically advanced areas of business and human activity.

Communications education and training must be adapted to supply the media with journalists who can help them cope with this information overload.

a. Emergence of highly specialised fields

New technology, revolutionary changes and market fragmentation have made many fields highly specialised and even technical. Press releases and press conferences are littered with new concepts, buzzwords, jargon and acronyms.

Keeping the news consumer informed requires knowledge and familiarity with these developments and the concomitant new terminology.

Media journalists must be trained to translate the jargon and specialised terminology into layman's language -- not just pass them on to an increasingly confused audience.
b. Keeping track of new technology

New technology has a life span of nano-seconds before it is upgraded, improved, miniaturised or modified into oblivion. Journalists tie themselves up in knots trying to explain new technology in layman's terms.

This poses a special challenge to the journalist, even if he is considered somewhat of a specialist in a particular field. He must therefore be given a thorough grounding in trends and developments in technology.

Familiarisation tours, visits to exhibitions, briefings by literate technical experts and vivid visual material should be incorporated into the education and training process.

c. Broader knowledge-base needed

The information and technology explosion, rapid industrialisation and urbanisation has changed the meaning of the term 'currents affairs'. General knowledge must be replaced with specialised knowledge.

A grounding in a liberal arts field is no longer sufficient to enable a graduate to cope with the needs of news-gathering in a complex and ever-changing society.

The media needs journalists familiar with political economics, business strategies, new management methods, industrial processes, scientific research and technological developments in important fields.

Communications education should therefore incorporate information seminars on such diverse areas by practitioners who can inform them of the latest developments.
2. **Coping with Post Cold-War Ethics and Realities**

The end of the Cold War has created a new political reality: the perception that capitalism has won and the wholesale adoption of capitalistic political solutions for everything -- from privatisation to open markets and the global village.

Unfortunately, this has brought with it an erosion of some basic human and ethical values in the all-consuming chase for the now almighty profit-margin.

The political-business complex which has replaced the military-industrial complex often leads to confusion among journalists in evaluating what is good for the people as against what is good for business and therefore the economy and the country.

a. **Keeping Social Issues in Focus**

The imperative of creating a good investment and business climate seems to have shifted media focus from social issues to business and economic issues.

The danger is social issues may in future be seen through money-tinted glasses: what is bad for business is bad for the country, what is good for business is good for the people.

Communications education must increasingly emphasise the importance of keeping social issues in focus by exploring the social implications of change and development.
b. **Need for Emphasis on Ethics**

Family, human and ethical values often can quite easily be eroded in a society experiencing booming economic growth and rapid development like Malaysia.

The media too is starting to experience this erosion with journalists who can to some degree or other be influenced by the men bearing free gifts and large cheque books.

Media education and training, now more than ever, must place a new emphasis on ethics in journalism and the media.

c. **Protecting the Consumer's Rights**

Promoting a good business environment is often misinterpreted as meaning promoting businesses rather than objectively reporting on their activities and the implications of these on the consumer and his rights.

The media needs journalists who can see both sides of the picture in any situation and provide the reader with balanced reporting.

Education of journalists must emphasise their role in protecting the ordinary consumer from unfair, monopolistic or exploitative business practices.
3. Preparing Journalists for New Media Technology

Most media organisations have computerised many of their operations for some time now. Yet there are still journalists who suffer from computer phobia. They resist the introduction of newer technology.

This is also true of some new recruits coming in from institutions doing communications training. They are more willing to learn, perhaps, but they should in fact already be aware of the technology and be ready and willing to use it.

Media education should include at least an introduction to the new technology and their uses in news gathering, news writing and news production. Teaching of basic communication skills should where possible incorporate some of the new tools.

a. New Technology for News Gathering

Laptop and Pocketbook Computers

The use of such portable computers is spreading with many field reporters using them in reporting from conference venues, sports arenas, disaster scenes, outstation trips, overseas visits and when they are sick or off, even from their homes. Using them requires knowledge about power supplies, batteries, hard disks and laptop computer software.

Modems, Faxes and Linkups

While the home-based journalist is not a reality yet, field journalists increasing use such tools to become mobile and communicate efficiently with news sources everywhere. They have to know about communications programs, fax-modem programs and methods of accessing remote networks and systems.
Digital Cameras and Photos

More and more newsrooms will be dealing with digital photos. Field journalists may in future need to take digital photos, scan print/negative materials and transmit them to the home office. They may also need to learn to crop and size them before transmitting them.

b. New Technology for News Writing

More Sophisticated Word Processors

Journalists increasingly must learn to use the more advanced word-processors which offer more writing tools and fit into the world of DTP. Knowing DOS-based word processors will no longer be enough -- they must learn to use sophisticated graphics-interface based programs.

New Word Processing Tools

Many word processors, even DOS-based ones, already offer a spelling-checker, an electronic thesaurus and outlining tools. Those that come with the more sophisticated word-processors are even more powerful. Potential journalists should be taught how to effectively use them to improve their writing.

On-line Information and News Databases

The advent of services such as Jaring, Internet and newspaper on-line libraries means journalists must understand how to use them effectively for background material. More important they must be taught how to use them to analyse trends and developments to make sense of the information overload faced by readers.
c. New Technology for News Production

Desktop Publishing Systems

DTP has been around a long time but some media organisations in Malaysia were just switching to it. But DTP systems are complicated and give a new perspective to newspaper layout and design. The use of DTP and its underlying concepts, advantages and pitfalls should be part of communications training.

Proper use of DTP requires a sound grounding in layout and design principles as well as a knowledge of additional skills which used to be handled by the pre-press and production departments such as pagination, page sizes, print-area and paste-up of text, as well as placement of visuals and rules and screens.

Systems Related to DTP

Mastery of DTP also requires familiarity with several new areas of skill and knowledge which used to be exclusive purview of other specialists:

- Electronic Typefaces and Typography
- Computer Colour Control Systems
- Computer Graphics Programs
- Proof Printing
- Output and OPI
### Breakdown of PETS Trainees Qualifications

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<th>Pets Scheme</th>
<th>SPM</th>
<th>STPM</th>
<th>DIP</th>
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## Pre-entry Editorial Training Scheme Statistics

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