

by Stephen E. Arnold  
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At the Online Information show in London this December, I will be moderating a session and giving a brief talk about real time search. As I write this, the summer doldrums have arrived. Two online storms are building and threaten to crash into the online world weeks before the December online conference.

Look at the two pictures below. One shows you a local weather station. Most people check their local weather forecast and make important decisions on the data captured. I don't walk my dogs when there is a local thunderstorm. Tyson, my former show ring boxer, is afraid of thunder.

*Caption: The Local Weather: Easy to Monitor, Good for a Picnic*



*Image source: <http://www.usa.gov>*

The other picture taken from an earth orbit shows a very different view of a weather system. Most people don't pay much attention to global weather systems unless they disrupt life with hurricanes or blizzards.

Local weather may be okay for walking a dog. Global weather may suggest that I need to prepare for a larger, more significant weather event.

*The Weather from the International Space Station*



*Image source: <http://www.usa.gov>*

I want to identify these two storms and put each in the context of a larger shift in the information ecosystem perturbed by real time search. The first change in online is the

momentum within the struggling traditional newspaper business to charge for content. Two traditional media oligopolies appear to be shifting from the horse latitudes of declining revenue, shrinking profit, and technology change. Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation wants to charge for quality journalism which is expensive. I am paraphrasing his views which have been widely reported.

The Financial Times--confident with its experiments using information processing technology from Endeca ([www.endeca.com](http://www.endeca.com)) and Lexalytics ([www.lexalytics.com](http://www.lexalytics.com))--continues to move forward with its "pay for content" approach to its information. The fact that the Financial Times has been struggling to find a winning formula for online almost as long as the Wall Street Journal has not diminished the newspaper's appetite for online success.

With these two international giants making a commitment to charge customers to access online content, this local storm system is easy to chart. I think it will be interesting to see how this shift in a newspaper's traditional business model transfers to online.

One cannot step into the same river twice, so I am reluctant to point out that both News Corporation and the Pearson company have struggled with online in various incarnations. News Corporation has watched as Facebook.com reached 350 million users as MySpace.com has shriveled. Not even the tie for advertising with Google has been sufficient to give MySpace.com a turbo boost. The Wall Street Journal has embraced marketing with a vengeance. I have documented in my Web log ([www.arnoldit.com/wordpress](http://www.arnoldit.com/wordpress)) how the Wall Street Journal spams paying subscribers to buy additional subscriptions. You may have noticed the innovation section of the Wall Street Journal that featured some information and quite a bit of marketing for a seminar series sponsored by a prestigious US university. I was not sure where "quality journalism" began and where the Madison Avenue slickness ended.

The balance sheets of these two publicly traded companies will be the dashboard I use to measure each organization's success with for fee content.

The other storm system is one that is visible to individuals equipped with instruments that measure the datasphere where Twitter "tweets", Facebook.com's business "Pages", and real-time video on Yfrog.com and Twitvid.com swirl. You may be familiar with Twitter.com, a service that has experienced significant technical challenges. Despite those, Twitterholics remain faithful. Facebook.com has moved aggressively to support real time messaging, and even Google has introduced new "gadgets" to give users of its iGoogle service (<http://www.google.com/ig>) more real time communication tools. The method of access includes traditional boat anchor desktop computers, the netbooks, and the proliferating portable mobile devices.

This storm front is created because hardware like the video enabled Apple iPhone 3GS, social platforms like Facebook and Twitter, user generated content streams pumped out in near real time via RSS (really simple syndication), and video sharing services. The second storm front is like one of those pictures taken from the International Space Station. The image shows local storms but the larger weather patterns, invisible to those on earth, are spanning large areas. I looked at one photo that showed a weather system reaching from the coast of Brazil to Cote d'Ivoire. The second storm front is one of these larger systems.

I want to be clear that I am going to express my personal opinion based on my research into this relatively new area of real-time search. I use tools such as Collecta.com, Surchur.com, Topsy.com, the Google Web log search, itPints.com, and many others to track the real-time information.

Real time information is the raw material of more thoughtful analyses. I think of the explicit content and the metadata my Overflight system ([www.arnoldit.com/overflight](http://www.arnoldit.com/overflight)) as "ahead of the curve" information. By the time the information and data from these real time streams find their way into CNN, BBC, or a traditional newspaper or magazine, the time delay can be significant. A newspaper—even with an online newsroom--has to apply a method which is the traditional value add. For me, that is often too long a delay. With the time to decide shrinking, I cannot wait five minutes, one hour, or a day much less than 48 hours. Two days in Internet time can be significant for many organizations. I am not alone. Real time information is the fodder for predictive analytics.

The action is shifting to predicting the probable outcome from real time actions. Who wants to read news about a Washington DC subway crash three days after the event. I want to know why the trains are not running now and why.

What happens when these two weather systems interact?

First, the smaller weather system is subsumed into the broader weather system. This means that companies trying to deal with traditional methods are likely to find themselves swept away like the lounge chairs on the beach when a tidal wave crashes ashore.

Second, the broader system's dynamics will become the ones that have to be mastered in order to survive. For publishing companies, this means that the business models have to be adapted to the broader weather system. The old business models won't be as effective or, even worse, may be completely ineffective in the boundary between the two weather systems. Once in the larger, real time system, the business models may be ineffective and subject to a Darwinian reality: the fit survive.

Finally, the movements and behaviors of the larger system are not well documented or fully understood. After all, it wasn't until man orbited the earth that the larger, global weather systems began to be visible. Even today, these are not part of the local weather forecast.

In closing, the traditional information companies in books, newspapers, magazines, and commercial databases are in a position where opportunity exists. The question is, "Will these organizations take shelter in underground storm cellars, or face the approaching storm with innovative methods that allow them to thrive in the new conditions?"

My instinct is that the new platforms will spawn new ways to create, access, monetize, and repurpose the real time information. Newspapers, like libraries, will be marginalized as specialist institutions. Traditional publishers will have a role to play, but I think it will be closer to that of the curator of the Roman exhibit at the British Museum, not the leaders of a society that thrived in the not too distant past. Time, scope, and innovation--those are the keys to the survival of media that are nearing the age for assisted living. When the larger weather system hits, the folks with the walkers and the wheelchairs need to take cover.

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