

The Quiet Offset Revolution

By JOHN TEBBEL

IN THE tough, competitive world of the communications media, each striving for its fractional share of the consumer's interest and money, newspapers are often depicted as beating a dismal retreat. They are, it is said, not what they used to be, but as Dizzy Dean once remarked, what in hell is?

The facts are that the newspaper business is healthy in spite of both competition and the cost squeeze, which affect other media as well. It is neither disappearing nor fading, but is undergoing a transition, adapting to a changing society. The adaptation is least successful editorially, and since this area is so charged with emotion and opinion, criticism and defense of editorial conduct tends to overshadow what is happening in other aspects of newspaper making.

What is happening is a quiet revolution in the composing room which may well have far-reaching and not wholly predictable consequences for the communications industry. Technological advances have always been slow in the mechanical publishing of newspapers, magazines, and books. There was little progress in the graphic arts from the fifteenth century to the early part of the nineteenth, but the creation of a mass market in America between 1825 and 1900, coupled with the great leap forward of the Industrial Revolution, produced startling changes. Then there was another comparative lag until the pressures of our own difficult times stimulated a new wave of invention, and the quiet revolution began.

The chief pressure, of course, has been economic. The astronomic rise in the cost of such basic materials as newsprint and ink, added to steadily ascending labor costs, has slowly been eating away at profit margins, without a concomitant rise in circulations and prices. Only advertising, which has come to dominate many newspapers, has saved the business from anything worse than a slow attrition in the number of newspapers. Many a publisher has seen his property slipping away from him through the composing room door, and in this respect all newspapers, whether large or small, share a common danger.



Offset: "... delivers a cleaner, more dramatic product."

Technical research and development is beginning to stem, if not turn, this tide. Charles H. Tingley, managing director of the American Newspaper Publishers Association Research Institute, believes that there are today more proven practical new processes available to newspapers than they can possibly adopt. The Institute will spend nearly \$600,000 in 1961 in the effort to find ways to make better newspapers; twenty-five years ago there were no technical research programs at all being carried out by the newspaper industry.

While there are any number of exciting developments taking place as the result of research, perhaps the greatest interest centers in the dramatic rise of offset printing, in its application to newspaper publishing.

What is offset? One authority, Howard Bezanson, defines it as a kind of printing "in which the image to be reproduced is carried on the surface of a photographically prepared plate, either metal or paper. Image and non-printing areas are on the same plane (roughly speaking) with water applied to the non-printing areas to keep the

ink on the printing areas from spreading, since water and grease (ink) do not mix. In modern lithography the plate is wrapped around the 'plate cylinder' from which the inked image is transferred to the rubber blanket of the 'offset cylinder' and then to the paper being carried between the offset and the impression cylinder." It is thus distinguished from letterpress, in which a raised surface carries the inked image directly onto the paper, as a rubber stamp does.

In the letterpress composing room, skilled linotype operators set copy on machines which cast hot metal into lines of type, called slugs, which compositors then place in metal forms to make up a newspaper page. Each page is then impressed on a papier-mâché matrix and cast again by the process called stereotyping into a curved metal plate which locks on the cylinder of a press.

The offset composing room, on the other hand, consists of a girl, or girls, setting copy on a machine that looks like a typewriter. The machine punches out a tape which feeds into a "slave" machine that automatically spaces the words into lines of type, set column width. These columns are then cut and pasted on a newspaper page, pictures are pasted into place, as are headlines and advertising set by any method (or even clipped from proofs or other newspapers), and the page is photographed onto a thin aluminum plate which bends onto the offset press cylinder, and is then printed in a manner described in the definition. The result is a reproduction of pictures and of any type face that is often superior to letterpress. The savings in the composing room are obvious.

FOR reasons that may be equally obvious, large metropolitan dailies do not yet find it advantageous to use offset, but the method is revolutionizing the small daily and weekly field. The most recent lists compiled by the ANPA's Institute show 431 weekly newspapers and 41 small dailies using offset. The Middletown (N.Y.) *Times-Herald-Record*, a daily with 24,000 circulation, is presently the largest of these, but next spring the national small-town newspaper called *Grit*, published in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, with a circulation of more than 900,000, will be printing in offset.

Offset, it should be added, is not a new process. It was discovered in 1796 by a European printer who found that by drawing with a grease pencil on the flat, polished surface of a limestone slab he could wet the stone and print an image by rolling on the ink. For more than a century, however, the use of offset was confined to magazines, cata-

logues, and certain kinds of job work. Meanwhile, letterpress equipment was being constantly refined and the entire printing industry was geared to it.

Several East Coast newspapers tried offset in the early 1930s but abandoned it because the materials were too expensive and the machines to make it really feasible had not yet been invented. The first successful offset newspaper, according to William D. Rinehart, director of the Mechanical and Service Division at the ANPA Institute, was the Opelousas (Louisiana) *Daily World*, which began in 1939 and remained the only daily offset paper until the early 1950s.

RINEHART, a leading expert in the field, points out that offset, which is primarily a photographic process, offers publishers complete flexibility in permitting copy to be set in any manner from a ball point pen on up to hot metal linecasting machines, the "cold type" machines already described (used by most plants), or the newer phototypesetting equipment. The high quality of reproduction makes advertising and pictures in an offset newspaper stand out sharply by comparison with ordinary letterpress reproduction, and since no engraving is involved, an offset paper can afford to carry many more pictures. Offset presses produce only 12,000 to 30,000 papers per hour at present, but the new Hoe Lithomatic, which *Grit* will use next spring, at 50,000 papers per hour will compare favorably with presses in metropolitan plants.

Overshadowing all other advantages, however, is cost. It has been axiomatic for some time that only millionaires can start newspapers, but with offset a man who has talent, a very small staff, and \$10,000 can be a successful publisher. For example, the Evanston (Illinois) *Review* was started on the proverbial shoestring a few years ago in that well-heeled Chicago suburb, and in spite of the earnest efforts of the Chicago newspapers to put it out of business, it is fat and prosperous today, with 22,477 circulation and enviable advertising lineage.

Another highly successful effort in the field is the Arlington (Texas) *News-Texan*, whose thirty-two-year-old executive editor, Charles Lewis, recently described his experiences in "The Quill," Sigma Delta Chi's magazine for journalists (itself newly renovated). Summing up, Lewis declares: "Take any stage in the newspaper production process, lay parallel phases—cold type offset and letterpress—side by side, and cold type is easier, quicker, and delivers a cleaner, more dramatic product." Lewis believes his trump cards

are color, photos, make-up drama, and speed on spot news. The color on his front page costs him only \$18 per day. Usually one or two colors introduced in the platemaking process are employed, but it is possible to use a four-color process from news photo transparencies, and Lewis boasts: "We can be on the press in forty-eight hours with full, natural color production, thanks to recent installation of our own color separation camera."

Like all offset papers, the *News-Texan* has its problems in editorial makeup. Since "cold type" cannot be leaded—that is, spaced out with lead slugs to fill space—makeup on a page has to be highly accurate to avoid an overabundance of fillers or too much spacing-out in the headlines. Cutoff lines constitute a problem, too. Since they are drawn on the page with art pens, their size must be uniform. Headlines must be placed on the page with a T-square so they will not emerge crooked; the eye cannot be trusted. Glue and wax used in pasting up a page has to be used with extreme care because these materials turn dark after they dry and may produce a spotty page.

But these difficulties, and others inherent in the limitations of the equipment itself, are the troubles of a pioneering industry. New processes, new machines, are in a constant production ferment, and offset appears to be the wave of the future among small dailies and weeklies, which have been revived and given the means to turn out within reasonable economic bounds a bright new product designed especially to serve the suburban-area living design which is spreading over the face of America.

METROPOLITAN newspapers are watching these developments with an interest well tinged with envy as they battle their own production costs. There is nothing in the near future of offset likely to cause these big dailies to abandon their hot metal, letterpress operations, but publishers are aware that technological development in newspaper production is now moving at an astonishing clip, where it had crawled for so long. There have been more radical innovations in the past fifteen years than occurred in the entire half-century before the Second World War.

As the ANPA's expert, Rinehart, sums it up: "To what size newspaper offset will spread is still unknown and will depend to a great extent on new developments in phototypesetting, cold type, plate making, plate life, and press development." On the basis of recent performance, these developments will not be long in coming.

Letters to the Editor

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major newspaper in the country! This critic has been responsible, to an astounding extent, for a great deal of the interest in cultural affairs that has been developed in Washington in recent years. Mrs. Leslie Judd Ahlander personally reviews all shows, encourages new galleries, prods staid Washington into looking at and thinking about new art forms, pushes and prods institutions into more and more cultural activity. More than any other individual in Washington, D.C., she has contributed to raising the professional standards artistically in the nation's capital.

BEATRICE PERRY,
Gres Gallery.

Washington, D.C.

A FRONT PAGE FOR TV?

THE PROPOSITION that the television networks use prime evening time to acquaint the American people with life on this planet ["Immodest Proposals," *SR*, Nov. 11] is hardly realistic. Before presenting such a notion in public, you should have consulted the president of the Columbia Broadcasting System, Frank Stanton, on whom *SR* conferred an award for public service not too many months ago. Stanton could have told you that he has suffered for years from the egghead view that television should be intelligent. He could have repeated to you, too, his recently expressed conviction that the trouble with many eggheads is that they are "not really reconciled to some basic features of democratic life."

In the painful course of research for a book on television, which I am now completing, I have had to revise my own thinking, which once resembled yours. I believed, originally, that television ought to note the possibility that "Pete & Gladys" might be interrupted at any moment by nuclear shock waves. Although I doubted that our doom was imminent, I felt that, if it *was*, we should at least know why we were dying, and I did not feel that either Pete or Gladys, or Ozzie and Harriet combined, could handle the subject adequately.

You can see from this extreme position that my thinking was at least as far out as yours. But I have since made an effort to understand the viewpoint of broadcasters and advertisers, and I can tell you that their case against improvement is formidable.

I spoke, for example, with Rosser Reeves, of the Ted Bates advertising agency, and he explained that the alternative to current programming was socialism, with bureaucrats in Washington dictating what we shall and shall not see and hear. Mr. Reeves is vigorously opposed to socialism and assured me there was no middle road for television.

I also spoke with a thoughtful man at Kenyon & Eckhardt, who, on a busy day, set his Nielsen report aside and took time to make me understand that commercials

were the informative stuff of life. "What do you talk about at parties?" he asked. "You talk about the new refrigerators and the new cars, don't you? The new products. That's what interests people. That's what makes the wheel go round!" An equally discerning man at J. Walter Thompson displayed a package of cigarettes and said: "No one has ever convinced me that it takes any intelligence to buy this brand over any other. So why should we sponsor intelligent programs?"

Although these discussions contributed to my reorientation, I was not unshakably convinced that television should be ignorant until I encountered several comments by men who understood that TV advertising is the heartbeat of a free people. A letter to *Advertising Age*, for example, warned with the down-to-earth eloquence of George F. Babbitt: "An attack on advertising is an attack on the American way of life." The executive vice president of Young & Rubicam informed one of his audiences of "the genuine enemies of our free economic system who know full well that an attack on advertising is a telling blow at our mass distribution system." And a vice president of Warwick & Legler pointed out: "Tampering with television programming can derail the economy. . . . The public likes it the way it is, and it's good for business, which means it's good for everyone."

In view of these restrained and objective statements, it should be clear that the use of prime evening time for anything but garbage programming would be unpatriotic. If television talked sense to its audiences, how else could we be conditioned to jump at a product when the bell rang? How else could five aspirins, six toothpastes, and seven detergents spend our money to tell us that each is superior to the rest? How else would we be kept from starting to wonder what *else* we might possibly do with our lives between the time we are born and the time we die?

I have many more questions of this sort, and if I should ever find myself in a bomb shelter with Frank Stanton and Pete and Gladys, I will see if they have any answers.

HAROLD MEHLING.

Ossining, N.Y.

A TIME FOR QUALITY

I READ WITH interest your November 11 editorial suggesting improved TV programming between the hours of 6 and 8 p.m. or 7 and 9 p.m.

As one who feels strongly about the present poor quality of TV programming at this prime time, I wish to give your proposed revision my enthusiastic support.

This is the excellent time of day for some thoughtful, mature family listening. Children are ready for quiet activity before bedtime preparations; adults are relaxed and prepared to listen and learn after a full workday.

I would hope that there are enough other "front page readers" to make this a working reality.

BEVERLY C. FISHER.

Little Rock, Ark.

Books in Communications



Canon to the Right

LAURENCE FERTIG is a New York advertising man who for the past sixteen years has doubled in brass as economic pundit for the Scripps-Howard newspapers. His gloomy animadversions on the state of the economy bring solace to the hearts of hundreds of Westchester commuters as they wend their way homeward from the canyons of New York concealed behind the financial pages of the *World-Telegram and Sun*. There each week he warns of dire things to come as a heedless nation plunges further down the road to statism and poor old private enterprise gets pushed closer against the wall by that destructive beast, Government.

Not since the days of Fisher Ames has there perhaps been as eloquent a Cassandra as Mr. Fertig—unless it is Ludwig von Mises or Henry Hazlitt. Mr. Fertig is the nimble-penned interpreter of the Mises-Hayek-Hazlitt-Friedman school of thought, and as such is entitled to respect. He is about as far to the economic right as one can get and the persuasiveness with which he argues his cause is not to be sniffed at.

Mr. Fertig subscribes whole-heartedly to the *status quo ante* FDR, as this slim and slick compendium of his beliefs makes abundantly clear. In "Prosperity through Freedom" (Regnery, \$3.95) he propounds his undying fear of "the dangers of a government-regulated" economy, the "proliferation of so-called welfarism," and the "statist concepts of the New and Fair Deal."

Mr. Fertig has something irascible to say about every economic problem facing the nation today. He ranges widely, but with a narrow drive, through capitalism, socialism, Communism, economic growth, welfare and education, wages and prices, profits and employment, monetary and fiscal policy, and the balance of payments.

As Mr. Fertig points out in his foreword, he formed his philosophy in the years before (he doesn't say how many) World War II, when the dangerous John Maynard Keynes was perverting others, although he never succumbed to that siren call. Ludwig von Mises was his god, then and now. Thus he devotes his book to demolishing what his great hero calls "the popular fable of the blissful effects of government interfer-

ence with the market and of government spending."

Readers on the right will find this book a birch with which to whip their enemies and to stimulate their own fears. Readers on the left (or in the center) will perhaps profit more greatly than those who are already convinced that we are on the verge of economic disaster. In its 278 pages are most if not all the arguments long set forth by those who wish the general welfare clause had never crept into the Constitution. Mr. Fertig knows all the arguments and he knows how to set them forth in adroit journalese.

—KARL SCHRIFTGIESSER.

GAP-FILLER EXTRAORDINARY: An ambitious and immediately successful new quarterly has come our way in the form of the pilot issue of *Columbia Journalism Review*, published under the auspices of the faculty, alumni, and friends of the Graduate School of Journalism (Pulitzer) of Columbia University. Since nothing quite like it is available to the fellowship of journalism, although similar professional reviews have long been published for lawyers, doctors, dentists, and engineers, the *Journalism Review* is bound to be a success, judging by its first issue. Indeed, a bit of reporting has uncovered the fact that Dean Edward W. Barrett has received such enthusiastic response from the pilot that he will soon announce per-

COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW

PILOT ISSUE

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