

## ‘Epic 2014’ paints futuristic vision of ‘newsmaster’ scene



### Will blogger journalists be liable for content?

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Like you, I too was amazed recently to read the article that high school students take for granted our First Amendment rights. Maybe it was the result of growing up during the Vietnam War era. In college, protests were frequent and people expected you to speak your mind, so it never occurred to me during those formative years to consider that we should have less free speech.

Then this survey by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation comes out, telling us 73 percent of high school kids take freedom of speech and of the press for granted. And that more than a third of the kids surveyed think the First Amendment goes too far in protecting rights.

I realize that the environment today is not the same as it was when I was a kid. (I feel like I'm dating myself here.) Liberals were everywhere and the conservatives were those "old folks" who just got in the way of progress. Today, clearly the conservatives rule the White House and Congress and most of the liberals are considered the "old foggies" who can't see reality if it fell out of the sky on their heads. Rush Limbaugh constantly laughs at us.

I realize we have caused some of our own problems. Most of us would never have even thought for an instant about borrowing someone else's product off the Internet and putting our names on it. Or, geeze louise, of letting government pay us for what we were writing. Only people with no ETHICS would pull a stunt like that. So now should we wonder that our credibility rating is so low?

But yet I have now discovered my 18-year-old son and his friends are into blogging in a way most of us never imagined. He and his friends write about their daily lives and share those thoughts with anyone who happens into their sites. They freely express their opinions about life, about their worlds, about our world. They Google around the Internet, picking up poetry and music and sharing it with others. They practice a more basic, more raw form of journalism that many of us have never considered in all the writing we have done. Perhaps they are closer akin to the columnists that hold such an important place in our papers today.

Have they been taught in their history and government classes that all the freedoms they hold, all the processes of government they study, arise out of the foundation of the First Amendment? That even their ability to discuss how the system operates and the pros and cons of our government are nurtured through the rights inherent in the First Amendment?

I imagine most of you, the readers, are already addicted to obtaining some of your news each day from the Internet. You pick and choose the stories you read and, if you are aggressive about this, you may even have created requests from websites to deliver you the news as you want it either to your email address or in your own configuration on the webpage you favor. How does this foreshadow the future for our industry?

Back in November 2004, the Poynter Institute, in a post by Robin Sloan, linked to a FLASH project by the with INdTV, a new cable TV network based in San Francisco. Thompson is "content producer" for The Fresno Bee.) You can see the project at <http://www.robinsloan.com/epic/>. And you should see it if you haven't already. If you search for the term "Epic 2014" on the Internet, you'll find dozens of mirror sites for this video.

The conclusion of this piece is that by 2014, we'll be getting our news from "newsmasters," who create content streams on specialized topics. They gather data from around the world, filter and condense it and disburse it to you, the consumer, in the format and focus you have requested.

It fails to explain how these “newsmasters” are funded – who pays for them to do their work. And it fails to take into account the inherent risks those of us protected by the First Amendment – who will defend these “newsmasters” when they are sued? Or will libel suits as we know them go away? Who will represent these “newsmasters” when they must go to court to get access to the facts they need to do their job? Will government be more open to them than it is to us today? (Don’t hold your breath, folks.)

Ultimately, I can only hope that with increased blogging, and increased numbers of individuals on the Web who consider themselves “journalists” as we know the word, that appreciation for the First Amendment will rise among young adults and that the future will not be as one might fear, based upon the messages of gloom and doom we have heard lately.