

## STRATEGY OF THE INEVITABLE TRANSFER

### *Media outlet and Transformation Management of Print Mass Media*

(book extract)

by Yuri Purgin

### Why Was This Book Written

Do you know what quality makes a good leader? The answer is not that obvious. Management experts are positive that it is proficiency in coping with the uncertainty. At present, the mass media industry has found itself in the state of such uncertainty. The old established models of traditional mass media are not efficient enough. We are facing the decline of newspapers in print. Line radio has practically disappeared. The new generation prefers the Internet, not TV. New media such as blogs and social networks emerged. And finally, the mass media communicative models have been changing. The era of mass media transmission gave place to the era of interaction between mass media, readers, listeners, and viewers. Mass media companies are losing their monopoly to produce, distribute, and comment on the information. They are even losing their own news rooms. The editorial monologue addressing the reader turns into the readers' polylogue with editors.

In Russia, these challenges are more intensified due to not entirely defined status of the mass media. On the one hand, the democratization of social relations requires mass media who can be more independent: their rejection to be involved in the local executive power and large capital. On the other hand, we can observe quite opposite trends when social and political media are financed directly from the local budgets or belong to big finance and industrial groups. Does such mass media condition contribute to realizing their function in the present information society, or on the contrary, prevent them from doing that? Is there any alternative to such state of national media outlets?

Once, after my three-hour presentation for newspaper publishers, on the basis of the *Altapress Publishing House* independent editorial policy, I was approached by one of the local editors who asked me confidentially, 'Would you show me your GS?' He just could not believe it was possible to manage such a media outlet without 'gas stations' and sponsors support. I know for sure that today the majority of Russian editors of local and regional mass media are convinced that their life will not last long without the state support although, they claim that they are willing to be free.

Anyway, the Russian mass media entered the era of great changes when both, editors and journalists must start dealing with the uncertainty and learn to find their own solutions to challenges of the time. I hope this book will help concerned readers to choose the right direction. Essentially, the ability to make such a choice is the main quality showing a good leader.

This book, being in fact a summary of a more detailed yet-to-be-released work, is based on a series of lectures and training sessions for publishers aimed at developing strategies and implementing specific changes in small in size media outlets. To honor my colleagues, I would like to mention that our joint efforts resulted in their transition to a new level of the development, initiating their transformation. The course was based on studying international and Russian experience of up-to-date media system development, specific mass media companies, theory and practice of transformation management in newsrooms, and primarily on comprehension of how the *Altapress Publishing House*, led by the author of this book, functions.

The book consists of two parts. Its first part describes formation of vision and new strategies of media companies. It presents a significant supplement and a revised version of the original author section in the recently released manual entitled '*Multimedia Journalism*'<sup>1</sup>, for Higher School of Economics. I strongly recommend that you read this manual. It will help you to navigate better in the professional digital environment. The beginning of a new information era is truly revolutionary and requires reassessment and even rejection of the established thinking stereotypes, fundamental change in mass media institutions functioning, and a new approach to journalism. The second part tells how this transformation can be achieved in practice, how editors and publishers implement these changes, and why their daring ideas does not always turn out to be successful.

The solutions proposed in my book might be considered controversial by some readers hence they could determine their own position, their attitude towards the future of our profession, and changes that should be undertaken in their media outlets. Well, even in that case the book fulfils its purpose. It is important for me to make you feel restless, to induce you to act so that anyone can, based on our experience, change something together with the team. Good luck!

---

<sup>1</sup> See: Models of Modern Mass Communication in Media Space of People and Communities // *Multimedia Journalism: Manual for higher schools* / Ed. A.Kachkayeva, S. Shomova; National Research University 'Higher School of Economics'. Moscow: Higher School of Economics Publ. 2017, pp.219 – 248.

## Not a Student Session

Publishers quite often refer to their busy schedule and continuous problems to avoid talking about their company development strategies. ‘Why thinking about the future if I cannot afford my life today?’, or even more ridiculous, ‘We’re a small newsroom, we should work, no time for dreaming’. Quite enough to close the topic. Every day, hundreds of reasons prevent us from changing our life, and you can find more reasons for not changing the work of your media outlet. In the end of part one, we agreed on the fact that you are aware of the need for transformation and are determined now to do your utmost therefore we do not need to discuss how to cope with your doubts and laziness. How to break out of your daily routines? - that is the question. To do that we, as well as many other companies, use **annual strategic planning sessions**.

That might sound pretentious for an organisation with only a few employees within a small staff activity. Probably, seems to be excessive. Nevertheless, I insist that every word in this three-word combination is vital and meaningful for a media outlet of any size. With ‘**Session**’ we mean that reflecting on your future requires certain place and time, when it is obligatory to ‘unplug’, to distract your people from the daily routine and worries. That is why we hold our sessions at non-working hours. And preferably away from your office rooms, for example, in the countryside. One session takes several days, sometimes with a week or weeks in between. Like any session, it requires thorough preparation for every participant without exception. The success of the session mainly depends on the quality of the preparation. ‘**Strategy**’ indicates the perspective and level of your discussions. The topics should deal with products perspective, general assessment of the situation, views exchange on the future, structure, fundamental changes in work allocation, and discussions on the further development of your media outlet. ‘**Planning**’ assumes that, once the event is completed, you have a clear action plan, with terms and the personnel responsible for the result.

Why do we hold sessions **once a year at least**? Because this world is changing at a high speed. New technologies, market fluctuation, consumer change are factors that make us reconsider our place and opportunities in the information media. Each session should be special and unique. Your staff should look forward to such discussions ready to act at any time. Having a creative approach while drafting a session can increase chances for the effective result. Its goal is to inspire and encourage your people. They should look at each other as heroes of the future transformation and should find their own place in the winning team.

Sessions may vary in topics. For instance, when we needed to increase the influence of middle managers in *Altapress* as well as delegate authority to young managers, the topic of this

session was coaching. Each group had to implement an innovative project in order to develop corporate strategy. A young professional was entirely responsible for the project, while one of the top managers acted as his coach. Presentation, discussion, and assessment of such projects provided the new generation of managers with better understanding of the main strategy. They became our partners and allies, while we got a number of implemented projects for the strategic development of our media outlet, e.g. ‘Motivation and evaluation of the company managers’, ‘Self-repayment transition for the information group’, ‘Establishing of Advertising Service”, Profit increasing programmes for commercial websites’, ‘Standards of project management’, ‘Cultural evolution (new approach to human resource management)’.

One more example is the ‘Festival of Materialistic Ideas’. When *Altapress* faced the need to optimize and bring the company size into line with its new revenue structure, we decided to involve as many people as we could to find cost saving opportunities. The task of the session was to reverse corporate thinking, quit negative emotions always associated with staff and cost reduction, and show our potential presenting new competencies that can allow us, under normal circumstances, to be market leaders again.

During the session, the core groups presented their most interesting projects that could increase profit or save money in the future. In case the idea demanded an additional budget, its developers had to present a mini business plan. Each project had its ‘opponents’ and ‘advocates’. The former searched for vulnerable points, the latter underlined the strong sides. The jury consisted of the Board of Directors and selected the winners that were rewarded with sufficient amount of money. Most parts of these ideas formed the basis of our considerable optimization. I suggest you start your changes with such a session. Its goals will be as follows:

- *convey your vision to your key staff;*
- *accurate assessment of the current problems and potential;*
- *involve managers into thinking about changes: it happens when your ideas become the ideas of your team, when they are ready to take responsibility for this change;*
- *outline the general points of transformation of the media outlet performance, i.e. what structure you need to attain, how the products can be changed, and what steps must be taken for that;*
- *inspire them, give them a spark, encourage them;*
- *select the staff for transformation team.*

Here come a few words about inspiration and self-esteem. At one of the sessions, I made up my mind to conduct a short survey. It was divided into two parts: what our vision of the

company is, and what company we want to work for. In the first part, in addition to positive points, it was necessary to indicate the obstacles to development, and the way to overcome them. We summarized the answers and got the **following results**:

- 'We have always been following the right principles of quality journalism, publishing business as well as economic and political independence.
- We know we are one of the best media outlets in Russia.
- We are sure that we've got an enormous potential developed due to the efficient corporate culture.
- We trust people who make this company.
- We believe we are able to do better.

#### **What are the current obstacles to development?**

- The company exceeded the current management structure, i.e. it is not flexible, indifferent, and bureaucratic.
- Many people complain of time shortage which tells of their inability to work effectively and to lead their team.
- The small size of the market is an obstacle (extra activity costs money).
- Lack of tools for the market analysis.
- Quality human resources problem, understated ambitions, and the need of control over mere details.
- the company is lacking the key competence of "world standards"; the company is not up to the level though it is able to.
- Economic uncertainty (delay of the analysis).
- The absence of a tough system of responsibility for the final result.
- Sometimes the team can be hostile to new ideas.

#### **What is to be done?**

- change the management structure shifting the emphasis to different groups;
- create a system encouraging initiative and responsibility;
- 'clear the ship from shells' and optimize all costs;
- provide those who are responsible for decisions with analyzing tools.

And here are the answers concerning the **company they want to work for**. It is a summary but stated from the first person:

- 'I want to work for *Altapress*.
- I want to work for the company of free and talented people.
- I want my colleagues and me to enjoy the work we do.

- I want us to make more money and we don't want money to be an obstacle in life and work.
- I want us to conquer markets in other cities.
- I want to work for the company of ideas and great people.
- I am ready to build such a company.'

Years passed, but still these words written by our team at the session of strategic planning inspire me. The scale of changes you are facing demands similar statements. It is not by chance that *The New York Times* regularly adopts and presents to the public the statements on strategy and journalism they want to have<sup>2</sup>. I insist you study this document. Here is a short quote from 'Our Path Forward', published in 2015.

'We have more than doubled our digital revenue in the last five years and have amassed a considerable cash reserve. We have moved quickly to transform digital advertising, build our digital audience and subscriber base, and create the most ambitious multimedia report in the world. A strong and united team is collaborating better than ever across news, business and technology and showing why the dominant voice of the print era will be the dominant voice in the mobile era as well.'<sup>3</sup> What a selection of reasonable ambitions!

Think of how you can arouse similar ambitions in your editorial staff, how 'to infect' your team with the spirit of changes. The pessimist voice is heard once again: 'Why compare the NYT and my regional newspaper?' If you still do not know why, go to Belarus, meet Peter Guzaeyevsky, at his *Ganevichsky chas (The Ganevich Hour)* newspaper office, and ask him whether it is worth infecting your team with such aspirations. What Peter together with other colleagues from Belarus managed to do with their newspaper and website will be described further on. Now, we should prepare for the session.

You have a vision you are ready to share with your colleagues. It might be presented in the form of the report from the future. It is preferable that, your staff is well aware of the context in advance. You may suggest that they prepare something: read or discuss particular publications you recommend, analyze the work of a particular multimedia that is similar to your media outlet in size, and prepare a presentation on development trends of local media. And again, how to explain that they can't avoid changes? How can you make them believe the transformation is inevitable? How to encourage them to step into the right direction? Here, a mirroring method will be an aid, analyzing our products, work management, sales, and competencies related to general trends and competitors.

---

<sup>2</sup> Our Path Forward. - URL: <http://www.nytco.com/wp-content/uploads/Our-Path-Forward.pdf> , Journalism That Stands Apart. - URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/projects/2020-report/>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

## A Mirror for the Hero

I am offering you the instruments I use. No doubt, it is necessary to prepare a financial analysis of the past years to see the overall dynamics. The quality of the analysis depends on how accurate your records are. Keeping records of each product that you release is a plus. For you, there must be nothing new in those figures. You always keep them in your mind. Or to be more precise, you should keep them. Nevertheless, not all of them will be as you expected. Especially for your editorial team that is trying not to get into financial problems during the year. But it should be a must for your people to learn of their activity objective results. In order to get rid of the illusions. When you see how subscriptions and sale revenues from newspapers and advertisement have been decreasing you realize that you cannot go with the flow anymore. We still compare, in analytical reports, the current condition not only with that of the three last years but also with the most “prosperous” 2008, to make everyone see the revenues we lost, in order to stop wondering about our modest way of living but seek ways to increase revenues and profit.

Secondly, you need the product analysis, from the point of view of the public, content, and advertisement. It is also important to estimate this in comparison with your competitors. I advise starting with the public. To describe the target consumers of your products, you should portray the typical readers and users. They must convey real characters, like Masha, Sasha, Dima, and Glasha. You should describe their life values, age, tell where they study, work and live, know their living standards, what they eat and drink, where they dress, how they rest. In the CNN newsroom, I saw real size figures of such characters cut out of plywood, with the description of their priorities in mass media consumption. This was made for journalists so that they could always see the people they are writing for.

Once the portraits are created, it is appropriate to ask: Who are your major audience - Mashas, Sashas, or Glashas? Why? Because that is the way to distinguish the core audience. And immediately other questions occur. Which audience is more attractive in terms of increasing prints and users? How about your advertiser? In what direction, what kind of readers should we focus on? Then, you create the most appropriate portrait of your audience - Masha, Fedor, Nastya...

Now, you can compare your audience with the readers of your competitors. How big is the number of readers of this media type? Are they sufficient for all of you, or do you need to fight for them? Do your readers value the specific properties of your product, or that of your competitor? What are these properties? Does the reader get any practical use of your products? What exactly? How different is your product from that of your competitor? What is the difference? What subgroups can your readers be divided into? How similar or different

their interests are? What other reader subgroups your competitors have, or do not have? What are the things your readers might be not happy with? What information they might lack?

Why do you need such a detailed audience analysis for the big changes you are going to develop? Because your goal is to expand, to include The Millennial Generation who basically does not read papers into your audience and get back those who quitted reading newspapers and gets information from the Internet and TV. At this stage, it is very important to determine the consumer qualities of each of your products. Honest and accurate answers to the following questions can be helpful:

- ✓ What qualities of the product do your readers evaluate (3-4 points)?
- ✓ What values do you offer to them?
- ✓ What do they think about your product?
- ✓ What is the difference between your product and that of your competitor?
- ✓ What is your list of positive consumer qualities?
- ✓ What shortcomings can you find in your product and what are your readers missing in it; what expectations does the content fail to meet?

To get answers to these questions you might need to select several focus groups, and you can hardly overestimate the importance of the answers received because, in fact, they will be a part of the future action plan. Then you can proceed with the detailed comparative analysis of the products. You have to compare the edition structure, topics, preferences of the editorial staff, and to understand whether your content meets your readers' expectations.

Thus, the following questions occur:

- ✓ What is the structure of your publications and that of your competitors? What are the differences?
- ✓ Does the structure and topics of the analyzed products match your own idea of good quality publications of the type?
- ✓ What appeals to you most among your products and your competitors products?
- ✓ What do you really dislike?
- ✓ Does the presented content match your specific audience and that of your competitors?
- ✓ Due to what materials you can attract more audience?

The presentation form and format matter as well. It would be perfect to define the presentation forms that will distinguish your media. Analyzing forms and formats would allow you to expand your audience. And again, new questions will help you here.

- ✓ Which of the presented formats are the most successful?
- ✓ What forms does your media lack?



- ✓ What materials evoke a positive emotional response?
- ✓ Which publications can be painlessly discarded?
- ✓ What values do you offer? How can the readers find out your products are valuable? Do you create value signals/markers?

The quality analysis of the content will certainly give you the answer to the key question ‘What content do you lack?’ What values you could but do not offer to the readers of this type of publications? How can you make it? What visual and content elements can help you offer these values? Are there any useful tips you could borrow from your competitors? How can you re-use and adapt them to your product? This is the way to build the basis for your content transformation plan. Sometimes the analysis may motivate you to change the focus of your media production. Or, you might want to create a new application. Or even a new product.

A similar approach is used in advertising. You can analyse advertisement sales by using the following questions:

- ✓ What is the number of advertisers in the edition of our type?
- ✓ Do they appreciate the specific quality of our product and the products of our competitors?
- ✓ Do we have service substitutes; how they could satisfy the advertiser?
- ✓ How will advertisers benefit from advertising in each of the editions?
- ✓ What sub-groups can our advertisers and those of our competitors be divided into?
- ✓ How much do the advertising service products differ?
- ✓ What qualities the advertisers value in our product (give 3-4 points)?
- ✓ What do they think of our product?
- ✓ In what way our target audience might be attractive for advertisers of various groups?
- ✓ What advertiser groups do we lack? Why do they ignore us?
- ✓ What advertisers are already with us? Describe them. How can we keep them and how do they benefit from working with us?
- ✓ In what direction should we transform the content to attract new advertisers?
- ✓ What advertising forms do we use? What new forms can we use considering specific features of the product?
- ✓ How large is the advertising potential of our edition? What prevents us from using it in full?

The necessity of giving answers to many questions assumes that they should be answered by different people. So, you have to distribute tasks in order to prepare to your session

efficiently and in due time. Journalists may take the audience and content blocks while the Advertising Service- advertisement ad sales.

As a result, you will get a perfect basis to carry out a good **SWOT**-analysis to determine your inner **Strong** and **Weak** points as well as external **Opportunities** and **Threats** for your company. To complete the process, you have to discuss the work management. The SWOT-analysis preparation is an excellent chance to discuss the company problems together with your team. And even a more valuable thing is to prepare the SWOT of your competitors and compare it with your own one.

### A Worthy Picture

We enriched your vision with an excellent analysis of the current situation in your company executed by your staff, plus some ideas on how to improve it. Still, what you really need is not a cosmetic surgery but radical transformation. How to involve your team into the transformation process? The strategic planning session can give an impulse to transformation, will show everyone that there is no other alternative, and then the long process of implementation will begin. It will be full of obstacles and you will face fierce opposition which might result in the dismissal of some of your staff who is not willing to accept the changes at all. But it is too late to retreat. Let me remind you that, at the strategic planning session, you had to select the transformation team including all key managers and staff from potential ‘transformation agents’ and volunteers who are claiming their eagerness to be a part in your digital revolution.

As for *Altapress*, working in the new way was preceded by a half-year preparation process. It started with the discussion of working methods in a new situation, journalist and editor functions, and successful convergence examples. The discussion was organized by the transformation team. It was quite a heated discussion.

- If you want me to work more you should pay more.
- What’s the use developing online if that doesn’t make money?
- We have a good newspaper. If we spend time online the quality of the *Svobodny Kurs (Free Course)* will decline.
- Let the young staff be engaged in the Internet. I am a poor user anyway.
- How can I being an editor, can produce the newspaper while formally none of the journalist are my subordinates?

Every question, every expressed doubt had to be answered by the transformation team clearly and to the point. Our intense discussions (we hold open meetings on a weekly basis) did not replace preparation of written job descriptions and duties, developing software

products, and economic calculations. But they managed to turn the staff into our allies, a team sharing same ideas.

All events were summarized in a ‘road map’ where we marked the stages of our movement towards the target. During the process, the map was added, the tasks were reformulated, the terms updated, and all the adjustments were registered. The mission of the joint editorial staff was formulated: **‘To produce up-to-date content for all platforms, with fewer employees making more money than today’**. To dismiss all questions concerning the journalist burden we determined the quantity of labor required to produce materials. The actual workload was measured and the most appropriate one was determined for journalists and editors. Calculations allowed estimating the project number of the staff of the joint media outlet. And we found out that journalists’ fears of working overtime in the future appeared to be far from reality. During the preparation, we described the production business process of each product. Methods of interaction between different departments and digital media were defined. We simulated conflict situations that might cause disputes (e.g. publication priority of ‘hot’ topics). Editorial standards for each media platform were revised and reformulated. Reporters took a specially designed test on editorial standards.

Apart from that, the staff training was held at the same time. In our company, Oksana Silantyeva was responsible for this part of work. Editors and reporters studied the basics of multimedia journalism, the work of news aggregators, mobile reporters, media producers, and social network editors. All of them completed their studies and passed tests in the new ‘admin’ software designed by our ITs. You can read more about it in the book *‘Journalism and Convergence: Why and How Traditional Mass Media Go Multimedia’*<sup>4</sup>.

Planning is the focus of the converged media outlet. Digitally, you can distribute tasks quicker and it is handy, since once the information has been entered it can be displayed in various formats. Besides, online planners such as ‘Google. Calendar’, ‘Yandex. Calendar’, wiki software, etc., have already been created to be used by you. If you spend your time accurately filling in the dates, events, and planned activities you can get a fairly complete picture of the current situation in your region for each of your planning meetings. Besides the possible transition into the digital form, you will have to revise the planning structure. It is advisable to organize online active planning meetings more than once a day, in the morning, before lunch, and in the evening. A weekly active meeting for a newspaper may be planned depending on the interest generated by a particular topic online. It is necessary to

---

<sup>4</sup> Silantyeva Oksana. Newspaper and Magazine Holding. How to Turn Traditional Editorial House into the Multimedia One (*Altapress Publishing House* experience on building an integrated multimedia newsroom)// *Journalism and Convergence: Why and How Traditional Mass Media Go Multimedia*/ Ed. by A.Kachkayeva. Moscow: 2010, pp. 79-102.

have a weekly mid-term planning meeting for the entire Information Group together with the Advertisement Service, promoters, and designers, to sum up the results, discuss statistics, identify problems, and monitor strategic development and project activity results. Monthly thematic meetings should be held to discuss important topics along with their traffic on the digital media. Projects are to be planned and worked out separately.

At the same time, we made organizational changes in the Sales Department and created package proposals (website + newspaper, website + radio, website + newspaper + radio). Advertising Service were taught how to sell online and got information on the released products. We also revised the budget and allocated responsibilities for sales of each product among the staff.

The preparation stage took us half a year. All job instructions were written and business processes regulated. Two departments tried to work in the new test mode, which later resulted in making several adjustments. Journalists tested their knowledge of the standards of the products produced by the converged media and they also succeeded in the required minimum of technical knowledge; the advertising staff passed test on sales. Together we managed to agree on the motivation and to make the work on all platforms attractive. In practice, however, we failed in making a perfect start. And mainly because of the opposition represented by the ‘stars’ who believed our goals, to create the content for digital media were undermining their personal freedom, younger staff dictatorship, and therefore “incompetent editors”, as they thought, who were challenging their status-quo. Ultimately, we had to dismiss some of our colleagues, although not without regret.

### Think of Your Happiness but Prepare to Resist

Transformation management gurus outline three main stages of the staff response to innovation, i.e. unfreezing, changing, and freezing. I would rather recommend you, before putting it into practice, study literature describing processes that inevitably happen to company staff when they try to radically change something.<sup>5</sup> In the beginning, people get shocked, reject your proposals, and feel absolutely irritated. And it is not coincidental that Kurt Levin, a recognized psychologist, described this stage as ‘unfreezing’. At this stage, innovative ideas collide with the media outlet routine. Whether you like it or not, this is an extreme situation for your staff. And you should accept that. You have been carrying your

---

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g.: *I.Adizes*. Managing the Changes. How to effectively manage changes in society, business, and personal life. 3rd Ed., Moscow: Mann, Ivanov, and Ferber. 2016; *K.Banker*. Developing the Ability to Change. How to help your staff meet changes. Moscow: Mann, Ivanov, and Ferber, 2013; *E.Flamholtz, Y. Randle*. Strategic Transformation Management. From Theory to Practice. Moscow: Eksmo, 2012.

ideas in your mind for some time, and many things are quite clear for you, while your colleagues can only understand one thing- it will ruin their life. They will have to study again, to work in a different way, and probably work even more. What for? They have already been doing quite well.

In theory, you should help your staff to put the past aside, minimize their shock, and be ready for the resistance.

In our case, at the very first meeting, we got an ultimatum from the 'Society' department engaged in social and cultural topics, where we were to prove that journalist workload will not change, the newspaper merged with the Internet will not decline in quality, otherwise they would quit. In order to guide the rebellious energy into the peaceful direction, we explained that the process of creating a converged media outlet will be the most transparent, along with thorough preparations, and all the questions will be discussed and studied in detail. The economists were to calculate the volume of work. The transformation team announced an open meeting for everyone who wished to attend.

The stage of changing, according to psychologists, doesn't start smoothly for the leader either. It usually starts with doubts, sometimes anger, bargaining, and depression. Before people accept innovations, they worry about themselves and are worried about their future. Therefore, you need your persistence, decisiveness, and the ability to convince. At this stage, we were advised to increase salaries, preserve the structure as well as deadlines for the materials and keep editor positions for those who were supposed to become correspondents. The faster the media outlet moved towards the success, the more disappointed our senior masters got. Oksana Silanteyva had a tough time then; the veterans tried to ignore her trainings motivating that she was not a journalist. But the young employees liked working with the Internet; they quickly and eagerly studied and mastered new business processes. The division became more obvious: either we move together, or we have to part.

The turning point was the attempt of the financial department to combine working online and making the newspaper. We established a consolidated fee fund and those who were writing online were paid more. The whole staff were gradually becoming involved in the development process of the joint newsroom. And at this point, when they were clearly facing defeat, the 'Society' department announced resignation. Which has even resulted in tears: some reporters were crying in my office confessing that they did not want to quit, but they would not betray their team leader who had been defeated as an editor but still being a wonderful journalist. Frankly, it was terribly painful to part with colleagues. I still blame myself for not finding the right arguments and make the 'star' stay, and to explain to the reporters what they were actually losing. But anyway, to stop halfway would be fatal. By that time, the vast majority accepted the changes, many people were happy to be able to work online; they got used to the new roles and became more confident in them. The first

results were already noted. The website increased its traffic and ranking, the newspaper was released in a larger format and had a new concept. Sales went up as well.

But, it was only by the end of 2015, a year after the transition to the new organisation, when the newsroom became functioning as a merged media outlet. It took time to create standards shaping the staff into a single whole and let the changes establish in our corporate culture. Some people kept working only for the newspaper, formally collaborating with the website. That lasted until we burnt the bridges, declared the ‘web first’ principle and officially transferred the whole editorial staff into the Internet group. This did not mean ‘print second’. It just meant the ‘newspaper’ started turning into the ‘local life magazine’. We did not miss a single event or news but initially all of them were presented online. Depending on the actual interests of the audience, most significant issues were brought up again and republished, with analytics and additional details, and then they could be presented online again together with all additional materials.

*Altapress* passed all the essential stages described in the management theory and completed its own project of transition into the digital space. If you are really determined to transform I recommend you take a similar path. Here are the milestones.

1. **Convince the journalists they have to inevitably conquer the digital space.** Form a joint vision. It is important to understand how you initiate the changes. You can do that during the strategic planning session, having engaged, beforehand, your editorial staff into the analysis of the current situation in your media outlet. Sometimes, it is helpful to invite ‘an outsider’, a media consultant, or a representative from a similar media outlet that obviously made a progress online. As a rule, journalists do not acknowledge ‘prophets in their homeland’, that is why outsider’s perspective on your situation might be very helpful.
2. **Form a digital innovation team.** Here, you have to gather the key personalities who can make this change possible. Later on, this team will become the basis of the transformation team that would include the main leaders and specialists along with the potential ‘transformation agents’ and others ‘obsessed with the idea’ who are anxious to be mobile, interactive, and online. What happens in the team should be interesting for the staff and be discussed in the media outlet.
3. **Work out a road map to transform the newspaper media outlet into the multimedia one.** This will be a collective creative work of the **transformation team** that you formed. The aim of the map is to define the path to reach the final goal, which is development of a truly multimedia outlet. Depending on difficulties you might encounter, the plan can be revised, the terms altered, and the events

changed. It is the main goal that cannot be changed. It is most advisable that even the final transition time point should remain unchanged. And you should not move around in the unknown direction. Make sure that each completed point of the plan is bringing you closer to the final goal.

- 4. Promote your vision of multimedia and all the aspects of multimedia life.** Please take into consideration that it took you several years to understand the future, but you have a very short period of time to persuade journalists, editors, and advertising managers to accept your ideas. That is why you need a promotional campaign. You should remember that the strongest inspiration, in this case, comes from knowledge, media consumption awareness, and information technology user skills. Studying, analyzing of case examples, and presenting your colleagues' experience will surely help. We held several discussions, prepared a number of presentations about companies that transferred from paper into multimedia, sent our key staff and leaders to visit the most interesting media outlets, and asked their top managers to visit us. Our Scandinavian partners helped us a lot. Taking part in the joint program of Fojo Media Institute (Sweden) and ANRI Agency (Russia) allowed our editors and journalists to understand the extent of the transformation and become aware of the fact that there was no choice but to develop a converged media outlet.
- 5. Cease resistance and create terms for your editorial staff to be engaged into the multimedia reality.** You should pay your attention to every question raised by your staff and analyze every claim in detail. Explain that the team will work harder in order to get the result as regards to traffic statistics; let your team get used to this idea. An appropriate motivation helps to get used to it. One of the main principles here is to literally gather editorial staff in the same space. The perfect solution is a large office room with a central front desk at which those who are responsible for content are sitting, i.e. on-duty journalists of the news department and editors, social network manager, and the technical editor. Near the front desk, there are editors of thematic departments, with their reporters and the design group. If don't have such an opportunity, still the structure of your working space that includes several rooms should correspond to the new organizational structure, with the operational content management centre. Information boards can be helpful, where the current statistics is updated, as well as your competitors' web sites, and TV channels news. The 'stars' are keen on long-form content, therefore make them responsible for creating a long-read together with a technical editor who can at the same time show the veterans how to use the new software media. High quality of your planning meetings, developing and discussing of new standards would also work as an instrument to engage your team into the new reality.

- 6. Demonstrate the results.** The best way to prove and verify correctness of the chosen path and show that all the efforts are not in vain is to demonstrate the first results to your staff. It might be the first long-read created by the above mentioned ‘star’, which gained the record number of views, or a successful interactive session with users, or the first website sales, or just increased traffic statistics. Any kind of success, even the slightest one can encourage, being a source of inspiration for the editors, therefore please don’t forget to present the first achievements to the staff. Journalists and the advertising managers must believe that goal can be achieved, anybody can develop skills to work with the website, and that it is great, after all.
- 7. Consolidate your success and proceed with the changes.** By the time your online beginners have lost their enthusiasm and euphoria, the success should be consolidated and changes must be continued. That means that everyone shall acquire the necessary knowledge for working with the website, while you have to prepare the next stage for the media outlet upgrade. You should make an intermediate assessment of the results as well as rewarding excellent performance. That’s what we did. The first changes in the newspaper and web site were followed by more profound reforms. The newspaper changed its format to Berliner and focused on the financially stronger audience. The website received an adaptive design and started opening service sections such as real estate, auto, events announcements, health, etc. Advertising Service got managers selling online. The newspaper and website went on taking part and winning in competitions, e.g. ‘Siberia - the Territory of Hope’, ‘Top ten Russian Newspapers’, ‘The Golden Gong’, ‘Economic Renaissance in Russia’. The professional recognition served as a strong motivation for the staff. Only few doubted the correctness of the chosen path.
- 8. Incorporate changes in your organisation.** Despite all our efforts and the results, we got, some of the employees preferred, for quite a long time, working only for one of the products. They did so until we, as it was mentioned above, made an explicit decision to move the editorial staff, including graphic designers, into the Internet group which was actually the Information Group. Thus, we became an online media outlet which offered, on a weekly basis, a selected content that was published in the newspaper *Svobodny Kurs (Free Course)*. Some of the newspaper editors worked as a website editor-on-duty. The service unit journalists wrote analytical articles for the newspaper. Designers prepared info-graphics for both products. And the standards that together with the editorial policy documents of the updated *Svobodny Kurs* were developed for the website contributed to consolidation of the transformation.



## A Daily Newspaper Released Six Times a Day

For traditional publishers who still cannot understand the difference between online and the paper publication I put it very simply. Imagine you have a daily newspaper and you should release it, for a start, three times a day: in the morning, afternoon, and at night, and further on, six times per day. Only then I can see that they start realizing what they are actually going to deal with. And finally, they can put appropriate questions: how to repack the content they have, how to use civil journalism, what content the readers need in the morning and after dinner. The standards of working online became one of the drivers of our growth. The main purpose for which they were created is the quality and technology of journalism. Let me show you an extract from the introduction part.

‘... Our goal-

is to strive for the **content and ideas production**. We have to produce, at this factory of ideas, the content of various types for various audiences. We can create all types of content, from hotlines to deep analytics.

We have three types of content. The first is **general news**. The second is a **deeply developed content** (with the analysis and comments) which used to be the newspaper monopoly. Our goal is to produce it online, in the **web first** mode. The third is the so-called **explanatory journalism**. Here, we are explaining the current issues. For example, if a new real estate tax is being introduced we have to explain to the reader what this means, who are involved and how much it will cost.

### Our Peculiarities

**We know how** to distinguish and highlight, from endless white noise, the useful topics that we can reconsider, add, repack, and, what is most important, rank. We are a media which gives you what you really must know. We make a picture of the day from the most important news.

### We are both, a content aggregator and a generator

Therefore, on the one hand, we present the daily picture as a whole accordingly referring to all sources, and on the other hand, we produce our unique content that allows us to overtake our competitors. We are a platform where external and our own material co-exist; the vital thing is to organize these into an accurate news picture. Why do we need aggregation? When you know how to form a daily picture, to process and present it correctly, and are not afraid of writing backgrounds, the user does not quit, he/she finds everything with you. Our web site has to become a news aggregator forming the news into plots (to be continued and explained). The reader will comfortably navigate in the news flow due to our editing filter (not important / important) and will be pleased with us. The idea is that the

reader should not spend hours trying to understand enormous amount of news - instead we are summarizing and making them clear.

We do not need to explain why we generate the content. **The unique content is our main competitive advantage.**

#### **We are convenient**

The text should be appealing and interesting for reading, and it might most probably become interesting for someone else. That is why we should not make the reader get stuck in a pile of 'raw' texts. We have to create easy to understand materials of high quality and to **be efficient providing multimedia services.**

#### **We explain**

Many people think that it is sufficient to inform the readers and they will find everything they need. Thus, it is important to answer, within the text, the main questions the readers may have.

#### **We are measurable**

The indicator of our effectiveness is the web site traffic. So, we work to increase visiting of the web site, accordingly, strive to get more users and viewers through our texts. Should our news collected less than one hundred views the author must have wasted his working time.

#### **We can get readers**

not only through the news feed on the main page. They also come to us rather actively from **search engines, news aggregators, social networks, messengers**, etc. All these are sources for our audience growth... ‘

I believe many of you are familiar with similar texts from the book of newspaper styles. Or, you may have written something like that yourself. But do you have any standards for working online? Our standards describe planning, working with news aggregators and social network, tell us how to write a good news text, improve the style, and provide it with additional features, i.e. references, links and clickable headlines. We have daily schedule standards that define when certain topics should be published during a day. There are specific rules for the staff on duty during the night/morning hours and on weekends. And the main point, we agreed on with Oleg Kopylov who initiated and created these texts, was that the written standards should not be forgotten, they should be permanently updated, discussed, and revised at least once a quarter. Wait and see what will come of it.

Finally, the last thing I would like to point out, which is the essence and the reason why I actually wrote this book: the transformation that you begin will last forever. In other words,

you will have to **keep changing**. The world is moving ahead too fast and the media experts have already identified new trends.

The **web first** concept is being replaced by the **mobile first** when all the editorial work must be adapted for mobile platforms. Last year, Google launched a project to accelerate the traffic for mobile adapted resources. It is clear that the competition for distribution will be crucial for online publishers while the promotion will become an exclusively editorial competence. Today, it is more important to create a reliable news filter with relevant and verified information explaining the facts than just to provide users with vast amount of news. Very soon, video will obviously become a more consumed digital resource. Gamification of the information makes us create untraditional genres. Audience managing opportunities based on the specific user behavior analysis suggest rather interesting perspective...

That is why, in *Altapress*, we are going to reconsider many decisions, make amendments, and, by all means, implement some changes. And what about you?