



Trends in Crime Journalism:

Feeding the Beast

Spot News Comes Faster Than Ever, But Could It Kill Credibility?

By David J. Krajicek

and Debora H. Wenger

**Criminal Justice Journalists
January 2013**

**A project of the John Jay College Center on Media, Crime and Justice
and Criminal Justice Journalists**

There is a “new normal” in the spot news business.

Breaking-news journalism—linked inextricably to criminal justice beats—is changing, driven by unrelenting micro-deadlines and financial pressures that have whittled staffs and forced editors and producers to rethink their newsroom structures and news-gathering processes.

We spoke with more than a dozen journalists, most of them veterans of crime and court beats, to get a snapshot of the evolving coverage. Many gave a sobering assessment of the new realities of covering crime. Most agreed that breaking news coverage has grown more stressful and less accurate due to the profound pressures of posting minute-to-minute updates on social media and websites.

“The news cycle is now 24/7 due to the Internet,” said Amanda [Lamb](#), a 20-year crime reporting veteran at WRAL-TV in Raleigh, N.C. “We no longer work for the next show. We work for the next five minutes on the Web.”

John Strang, an assignment editor with WFLA-TV in Tampa, called it “feeding the beast.”

At newspapers, “You’re going to see a functional separation between spot news and narrative writing,” said Andy Rosen, crime and courts editor for the *Baltimore Sun*. He continued:

If newspapers are going to create a unique product, we need to emphasize that we create stories that are interesting and exciting to read. We have a great skill in quickly producing compelling copy based on new information. Very few other outlets can do that, and most that do follow the same format that we use in our daily print stories.

However, such a strategy is not going to serve readers who are just looking for the most current information about a story that they already know about. They might not have time (or need) to search through a long article on a new topic. So there’s a place for a just-the-facts approach on spot news, even when there’s also a place for compelling storytelling. I’m not sure that we’ve arrived as an industry at the proper format for a breaking news story for the Web that allows people to see what’s new, while easily helping them find the more comprehensive coverage that we can provide.

Media critics have always found plenty to grumble about in coverage of breaking news. Their concerns have intensified with the increasing immediacy of spot news. Broadcasters say their top priority when they reach a breaking event is to report immediately—whether on the air or on social media—and to begin streaming video to the station website. Print journalists are under many of the same pressures to file words and video. Today, reporters are as likely to be scooped by a citizen-journalist with an iPhone as by a media competitor (who might also be equipped with an iPhone).

Some complain that the rush to be the first “Go Team” on the scene to provide bare details now trumps the motivation for fuller, well-rounded stories later. As a result, critics say, news consumers in some cities are fed anecdotal dots about breaking crime news, with fewer connective lines. But in a

countervailing trend, several broadcasters say they are rolling on fewer crime stories now, choosing more relevant events, and then trying to give viewers a fuller account when they do make it on the air.

“In the past 10 years, I think the appetite for breaking crime news has acquired more urgency—nothing changes a static news site like a ‘new’ crime story,” said Andrew [Smith](#), a veteran court reporter with *Newsday* on Long Island, N.Y. “At the same time, though, I think the tolerance for thinly sourced, incompletely reported stories has increased in order to accommodat

Errors of both fact and language, including spelling, seem more common as unedited material is uploaded directly by on-scene reporters, without an editor’s read-over, particularly at smaller news operations. At major breaking news events with national media competition, the errors seem to multiply.

Even many journalists were surprised by the fundamental errors that were widely reported in early coverage of the Newtown CT, school shooting last December 14. The errors went out into the breaking-news echo chamber and were repeated relentlessly on news websites and in broadcasts.

Among the [errors](#): the name of the perpetrator (Adam Lanza, not his brother, Ryan); his mother’s affiliation with the school (she had none); the details of the guns used (a Bushmaster assault rifle, not merely handguns), and Lanza’s method of entry into the school building (he shot his way through a door and wasn’t “buzzed” in).

Graham [Rayman](#), a *Village Voice* (NY) investigative reporter since 2007 who spent 11 years covering crime and other beats for *Newsday*, sees more carelessness by journalists, and he cites the pressure to blog and post frequent story updates as factors. Many journalists—working in both print and broadcast—say they now post directly to Facebook, Tumblr, Twitter and other forms of social media when covering breaking news. Errors result.

Of course, first reports from the scenes of complex breaking news events like the Newtown massacre have always been rough drafts. But now the rough drafts are being disseminated without oversight.

“I see it as wrongheadedness, and the pace of blogging has contributed to the problem,” said Rayman. “I see typos and missing words in blogs all the time—even at *The New York Times*...I see one-source stories (in blogs and on websites) where clearly the reporter didn’t wait for comment from a key source before posting. These are things that were absolute no-no’s when I was at Columbia (Graduate School of Journalism) and *Newsday*. That stuff just kills your credibility.”

The pressure to produce instant reports may be most intense for broadcasters.

We asked Mark [Becker](#), who has spent 28 years as a crime and courts reporter for WSOC-TV in Charlotte, NC, to describe how spot news coverage has changed for him in the past decade.

He said:

The fact is that now everything is instant. There was always pressure to be there and be first; and now, if it's possible, that pressure has increased. We don't hold information anymore. The station bought us iPhones about a year ago. As soon as you get on the scene of a story, you snap a couple of pictures and you get it on the website. You're streaming video on the Web if you're not going to be live on TV. This constant flow of information starts the moment you get somewhere. You may sometimes hold back if you don't see another crew somewhere, but most of the time that ends up blowing up in your face, so most of the time we instantly put it on air or online.

The danger is that sometimes you go on with something that's not quite cooked yet – it's information that may not be exactly correct. Maybe police haven't figured out exactly what was going on, but then they give you information and later you find out that the police or firefighters didn't have it right. It's hard to hold your breath and say you're going to wait.

Becker added that he does not expect the technology-driven pressure to diminish in the future.

"Any time technology goes up against tradition, technology wins," Becker said. "I'm sure Gutenberg got a lot of crap for his invention. He probably heard, 'It won't be the same if Brother Horatio isn't doing the copying by hand anymore.'"

Crime and spots news reporting have failed to adapt to the new realities of the Internet Age, according to Jonathan Stray, a journalist who specializes in data reporting.

"'Traditional' crime coverage," Stray wrote last year for Harvard's Nieman Journalism Lab, "produce(s) a journalism that just isn't as good as it needs to be. We need to try something new."

He argued, for example, that anecdotal coverage of crime—lacking connective context—has mistakenly convinced many Americans that crime is worse than ever. (To be fair, Luddites are rare in newsrooms these days. Many crime journalists now spend part of their time producing maps and other interactive Web [content](#), or—at larger shops—working beside producers who specialize in online content.)

And where do they find that extra time? Crime reporters have grumbled for generations about the time they spend on routine blotter items, though that sort of news filler has diminished. But is there an app for that?

Not yet, apparently.

However, automation of routine crime news may not be far off. A Chicago-based firm, Narrative [Science](#), offers "data-to-story" services that are being used in financial and sports news. It offers to "create stories with amazing quality and at a scale and speed currently not attainable using people alone." In theory, the firm could tease a story thread from raw crime data, then adapt it almost endlessly, neighborhood by neighborhood, block by block, perhaps even house to house.

Of course, many news operations have been doing detailed crime mapping for years. *The Los Angeles Times* has one of the [deepest data sets](#), with detailed crime information from nearly 300 neighborhoods in and around Los Angeles.

The [Omega Group](#), a San Diego firm that contracts with police and fire agencies, offers crime data sets from hundreds of cities coast to coast.

Many journalists offer a counterintuitive solution to time wasted on secretarial news: leave it to the police. Over the past several years, most law enforcement agencies have begun offering crime information directly to the public via their own websites and social media accounts, bypassing the traditional media. On the other hand, every reporter knows that great stories often spring from those small stories, as Baltimore's Rosen notes below.

What follows are comments from those we interviewed, in the form of an aggregated forum. Some of the interviews were done by email Q&A, some by phone, and some incorporate both email and a follow-up conversation. Several comments have been edited for clarity or brevity.

One bright spot mentioned by interviewees is the proliferation of investigative journalism nonprofits that partner with other media platforms to produce high-value, in-depth journalism, much of it drawn from criminal justice beats. Many of these organizations fill a void as newspapers and broadcasters have cut their own investigative units.

We've broken that section off as a sidebar below.

How has crime and spot news reporting changed in the past decade?

Hal [Davis](#), public safety team leader, St. Paul Pioneer Press:

We're trying to get away from spot coverage of every crime. We Tweet the lesser stuff, focus on more impressive crime stories, trends and enterprise and using digital resources....We recognize that we can't cover the waterfront as well as we used to. The newsroom still produces a full report each day, but perhaps with a smaller story count. Many staffers are frustrated. Some see this as the new normal.

Caroline [Lowe](#), newsroom manager in Santa Barbara, Calif., for KSBY-TV, after 35 years covering crime for WCCO in Minneapolis:

It's a 24/7 news cycle, so it's constant. Years ago, it was 'get it on the 5 and 6 and then repack for the 10.' Now it's getting it out on Twitter or Facebook first. The challenge now is balancing the competitive pressure and the need to get information out. I look at the reporting that came out of Newtown, Conn., and I wonder how could so much information be so wrong?...I think some of the plusses are we have amazing tools.

A couple weeks ago we were going to cover a pre-trial hearing and they were allowing cameras in the courtroom. Our photographer was off, so I asked the bailiff if I could use my cellphone...the judge said yes. I use my cellphone as a force multiplier. We don't

have the amount of people we used to have anywhere anymore, so we have fewer people and different resources. Sources are still huge; you have to have people to give you reliable information. The 24/7 cycle is huge, we have fewer people, we have tools, but it gets down to having people who trust you enough to give you information so you can go beyond the press release, go beyond the basic story to get to the 'why.'

Andy [Rosen](#), crime and courts editor, Baltimore Sun:

As an assigning editor, my duties are substantially different from those that somebody with a similar job would have faced even five years ago. Broadly, I'm responsible for the development of print stories and the translation of those stories for the Web. How can we make sure that as many people as possible will have an opportunity to see a story? How can we get it online as fast as possible? And what's a fresh perspective we can bring in the morning for people who have been tracking a story throughout the day?

Also, assigning editors have to lead their teams in developing interactive projects that would only be possible online. It helps to have staff members who are as engaged and interested as The Sun's crime team; Justin Fenton takes the lead on keeping the popular Baltimore City homicides map up to date, for instance. Without buy-in from staff, editors wouldn't have the manpower or the on-the-ground knowledge to do such projects. Reporters are also expected to be working toward both interactive and text-based projects. For many people, editors and reporters alike, this was a difficult shift. But overall I could not imagine running a team of journalists without them playing a primary role in our online strategy. Who is better qualified to make those decisions?

John [Strang](#), assignment editor, WFLA-TV, Tampa:

We don't have beats at all right now—everyone is general assignment. ..On the national level, crime coverage has increased because of the explosion of 24 hour news. It's a matter of feeding that beast. On networks like MSNBC, CNN, (and) Fox you see more spot news, crime news that you may not have a lot of interest in, but they have to fill time. You see them carrying chases live all the time, and when there is a big story, like Sandy Hook, you just see it go on and on and on for days. I think it's just because you have to fill 24 hours, 7 days a week. And you know, people still watch it...Local news covers less crime, for sure, than they did 10 years ago. As the pie got divided with more competition from social media and other news outlets, local news stations have tried to find ways to be more unique, to do stories that are different than what other stations have. If you concentrate on crime, you have the same stories as everyone else -- stations are looking for a niche to emphasize.

Graham Rayman, reporter, Village Voice:

In New York, one big change is the amount of basic information that the police department provides. Documents, access to detectives and responsiveness to media inquiries (except to favored media outlets) have all been crimped.

Mark Becker, crime reporter, WSOC-TV, Charlotte:

For years, I would go to the cop shop in the morning and then do the crime du jour. I don't do that now. We've had a change in philosophy. They'll still send someone to

check crime reports, but it's not a reporter; and I do fewer crime stories than I used to do. We still do breaking crime, but we are doing more other stuff and it's not enough now to say there's a murder in West Charlotte. We have to make it relevant. What used to be an automatic package may now be a VO (video only). We do less crime now and I think we do it better. We ask: why is it relevant, what does it mean, how is that important to people in the community there or on the other side of town? Relevance is what we're seeking in TV news.

Has your newsroom managed to do “less with more”? Trends or innovations?

Andrew Smith, court reporter, *Newsday*:

I've never understood that phrase. I think that what you do with less is less, not more. We have fewer reporters and more time devoted to putting breaking news on the Web, but in the grand scheme of things, we've lost some of the ability to explain and interpret events. Coverage is more superficial...I think different organizations are experimenting to various degrees with breaking news on Twitter, or at least publicizing breaking news on Twitter. I don't think that's done with any consistency anywhere, however.

Strang, *WFLA*:

On TV they cover crime the same old way as they did 10 years ago. On a murder story you don't see stations pushing social interaction, though we might gather more story elements through social media, like pictures of murder victims for example.

Susan [Tebben](#), reporter, *Youngstown (Ohio) Vindicator*:

We prioritize. When a teacher's assistant is accused of assaulting an autistic child (as happened here recently), maybe the police press conference on K9 unit collections can wait. “If it bleeds, it leads” is no less true than it was 10, 20, 30 years ago...Though we are already partnered with one news station, we have just recently started a radio show, video clips of which are also posted on our website, [vindy.com](#).

The radio show is about current events, national news affecting our cities and the future of business and infrastructure within our city. It is still an in-the-works project, but it's something different than what I have experienced so far in my career. Interaction between online readers and the newspaper to respond to stories and give story ideas has also been on the rise, from what I've seen. It's not just about circulation numbers anymore, but unique site views, Facebook likes and retweets.

Becker, *WFLA*:

Despite Twitter and that pressure to be instantaneous, in many ways we've become more responsible (in) reporting crime, and that's partly because as crime in Charlotte and around the country has trended downward, we've started looking at causality—

asking what's going on. It's not just cover the crime, but it's asking why these things are happening.

Amanda Lamb, crime reporter, WRAL-TV, Raleigh, NC:

More reporters shoot and edit now than ever before... There are always new trends. Right now it is active storytelling -- showing the viewer your process. How many doors did you knock on? How many calls did you make? How many documents did you read?

Davis, Pioneer Press:

Since our parent company, Media News, is now managed by Digital First Media, we are doing a lot more video, blogging, Twitter, Storify, etc. It has broadened our reach and, with crowd-sourcing, often improved our coverage.

Rosen, Baltimore Sun:

We have a smaller staff than we once did, so we can't always keep everybody doing exactly what they want to do on a given day. I don't think that's such a bad thing. When your staff is set up to be flexible and adaptable, it gives you a lot of options to deal with emerging news. There are obvious trade-offs, and part of my job is to balance the demands on the reporting staff to make sure they get as much time as possible to cover the small but important things that are happening on their beats and spend time in the communities they cover. Those smaller stories can develop into much larger ones, but even when they don't, they build credibility and context. I think this attitude extends throughout the newsroom.

Lowe, KSBY:

We get a lot from the public. I did a homicide story, and all of the video was shot by the neighbors. We got there after the fact, everything was gone, but they shot iPhone video. It's even more common than it used to be -- police, law enforcement or ourselves using our phones. I force myself to embrace the tools.

Tools allow you to do your jobs better -- it's very easy to talk about the good old days, but I want to be able to use every tool I can. Good reporting is a combination of technology and sources...It's not happening here, but other places are seeing law enforcement using the tools themselves—Twitter, Facebook, YouTube...More police departments are taking photos and video. We have fewer resources, particularly on weekends, so we'll say, 'Can you send us something?' You have to be clear with the audience what it is, who it comes from. The fire department sends us stuff pretty regularly; they shoot their own video and we get plenty of video of fires from them.

How much pressure is there for micro-deadlines on social media and websites?

Lamb, WRAL:

The pressure for immediacy is intense and constant. Being first is the priority...People want constant updates in social media about crime stories, especially during trials, which we stream and also post updates on social media.

Rosen, Baltimore Sun:

A lot of that pressure is external. Everybody on the crime and courts team values The Sun's reputation for police reporting, and it's been a long time since the morning paper was our only chance to break a story. Even before I got here, this staff had one of the most widely read and frequently updated blogs on the staff, so I didn't have much to do on that score. But we're always trying to be better and faster.

Becker, WSOC:

Everybody now has a phone with a camera. If you get somewhere you may not see another news crew, but you may see someone videotaping or Tweeting. We used to say we had a few minutes to gather information when we arrived on scene or we would wait until police could give you more information. Now, someone Tweets and I get an email or phone call [from the station] that so and so is saying this or the other station is doing that; what are you hearing? You can't assume someone isn't out there Tweeting or sending pictures to Facebook. I'd like to think it would change, but the genie is out of the bottle, and you have to learn how to manage it, and you have to learn how to just hold off. I'm not the first to say this, but I'd rather be last and right than first and wrong.

Tebben, Youngstown Vindicator:

There's quite a lot of pressure. The reporters here have separate professional Twitters to post their own stories and stories they find interesting. My main editor's computer is covered in Tweet Deck posts, Facebook statuses and Web posts. Update alerts from his computer are basically part of the background noise in the newsroom. A separate part of Vindy.com called "NewsWatch" is constantly updated with news from the city, the region and the nation, depending on what's happening. It's all about beating the other media sources to the punch.

Lowe, KSBY:

We're under pressure to file period; I wouldn't just say crime coverage. There's a lot of pressure to connect with audience in different ways--a lot of expectation to do that.

Davis, Pioneer Press:

I wouldn't call it pressure. I'd call it an expectation. I came out of UPI and Bloomberg. I'm used to quick turnaround. All staffers are expected to Tweet, and we use our digital resources imaginatively. I'm old school. People want news that keeps them reading. We have more tools to hold their interest. Media News' (the Pi Press parent company) digital guru, Steve Buttrey, would love us Tweeting in courtrooms, but Minnesota is not

as advanced in this regard as other states. The tension is always between NOW and What Does It Mean? We try to answer both questions. With this reporting team, we often do.

Strang, WFLA:

It's a point of emphasis, but if another station tweets something two minutes before we do, no heads will roll...Crime is as big in social media as any other topic. People getting news from social media are looking for immediacy—whether it's crime or news out of Washington, they want to know what's happening right now.

How do you see crime and spot news coverage evolving?

Tebben, Youngstown Vindicator:

I think much of crime/criminal justice news and spot news will be relegated to the Web page, with short updates as things happen. I think it's already becoming a trend to call, or text or even post updates to the Web from phones at the scene rather than getting the information and coming back to sit down and write. Full stories will always be in demand but the focus will be on how much information we can get as quickly as possible, and by how many minutes we beat the other markets to the information. Source relations are the asset in getting things as fast as possible, because if people know you, they know why you're there and can dispense with the niceties and just give you the information. This will become even more true as website updates become the standard for spot news.

Lowe, KSBY:

I think the challenge is having the resources to do it well. A serial rapist is always going to be newsworthy, but how do you put it in context, add perspective? With breaking news, that gets lost in the demand for immediacy. We have to really work at reporting stories that are relevant. I think there will always be interest in crime, but the pressure is going to be to give it context. Accuracy and context are going to be big things; unfortunately, I don't see the resources to do the in-depth stuff.

Smith, Newsday:

Like the business as a whole, I think the future of criminal justice reporting is in flux. I think news sites have yet to figure out the optimal balance between providing a continual diet of breaking news and stories that explain the news or dig a little deeper. I don't think it's clear how that's going to work out -- and that's true for everyone, not just criminal justice reporters.

Lamb, WRAL:

People say they want less, but in reality it is the most popular type of news.

Strang, WFLA:

Crime news is not going away. Stations have tried doing that. WTSP (in Tampa-St. Petersburg) tried to avoid crime stories and they just didn't do well with that, so they went back to covering crime. Now they're probably the most over-the-top station in the market. It never works when stations try to cut back completely on crime. The public expects you to report on crime.

SIDEBAR

Criminal Justice a Frequent Focus Of Investigative Collaborations

Criminal justice is the focus of a number of investigative journalism nonprofits, a component of what Charles Lewis, founder of the Center for Public Integrity, calls “the new journalism ecosystem.”

Journalism nonprofits are proliferating, and many focus on investigations of public health, safety, justice and corruption—subjects with criminal justice at the crux. In 2012, Lewis's Investigative Reporting [Workshop](#) at American University tallied 75 journalism nonprofits, up 25 percent from a count in 2010. About a quarter of the nonprofits are affiliated with universities.

The impetus behind the trend is no secret. As Richard Tofel, general manager of New York-based ProPublica, has put it, “There's been a market failure in producing high-value journalism.” (In another trend in most markets, print and broadcast commercial media—formerly at odds as competitors—are partnering on projects, which allows broader promotion and dissemination.)

The Investigative [News Network](#), an association of journalism nonprofits based in Encino, Calif., is becoming the Associated Press of news investigations, with more than 70 members. Some, like ProPublica, take on major investigations with international scope. Others, like the Tucson *Sentinel*, focus on local stories. Some lean more heavily on criminal justice investigations than others. California Watch, the *Texas Observer* and *Women's eNews* are among those that regularly feature crime-related subjects. Another is the [Broward Bulldog](#) in Florida, founded in 2009 by Dan Christensen, a former investigative reporter for the *Miami Herald*.

Many of the journalism nonprofits are captained by men and women like Christensen, former investigative specialists who were forced to remake themselves as media entrepreneurs as hundreds of newspapers and broadcasters trimmed or eliminated investigative units.

Typically, the nonprofits work in partnership with mainstream commercial media or fellow nonprofits. Some criticize this as investigative outsourcing, but the system has produced stellar examples of in-depth reporting in recent years. New York-based [ProPublica](#) partnered with National Public Radio's “Planet Money” and “This American Life” for its 2011 Pulitzer Prize-winning reporting on the role of bankers in the financial crisis. Its 2010 Pulitzer-winning investigation related to Hurricane Katrina was done in partnership with *The New York Times Magazine*.

In 2012, a broad group of journalism nonprofits collaborated on “Deadly [Patrols](#),” an investigation of a series of fatal confrontations with civilians by U.S. Border Patrol agents. The partners included KPBS in San Diego, the *Texas Observer*, the Nation Institute, the PBS show “Need to Know” and the Investigative Fund Investigative Newsource, affiliated with San Diego State University.

But the Center for Investigative Reporting in California may be setting the standard for the breadth of its partnerships and collaborations.

Its 2011 California Watch [investigation](#) “Shaky Ground,” which revealed that thousands of schools in the state lack earthquake certification, reached an as many as 10 million people, according to Robert Rosenthal, CIR’s executive editor. Distribution partners included ethnic media, more than 100 Patch.com websites and many of the state’s largest newspapers and TV and radio stations, including KQED, KABC, the San Francisco *Chronicle*, the San Jose *Mercury News* and the *Sacramento Bee*.

Journalism nonprofits like California Watch charge partners for use of content. Some are trying new ways to raise money from content; ProPublica, for example, has at least six eBook titles listed on Amazon—content repackaged as Kindle books and sold for 99 cents per download.

But nonprofit journalism survives largely on individual donations and foundation funding.

Speaking at Cal-Berkeley in 2011, Rosenthal revealed that the “Shaky Ground” investigation cost \$750,000. Revenues from the series totaled about \$50,000, he said.

“We are at the center of innovation and collaboration, but I can’t sit here and say it’s sustainable,” Rosenthal said.

In its 2012 report, the Investigative Reporting Workshop said the 75 journalism nonprofits in its database had total funding of \$135 million and 1,300 full-time employees, though those numbers were skewed by *Consumer Reports*, which had one-third of the funding total and nearly half of the employees (\$43.1 million and 600).

A few comments from forum journalists about collaborations and the state of deeper investigative journalism:

Graham Rayman, Village Voice:

I have a lot of respect for what ProPublica and others like it are doing. If they are able to provide particular investigative expertise, I’m all for that. In general, I think it’s a great trend. We’ve all watched the decline in investigations by even the biggest newspapers.

Hal Davis, St. Paul Pioneer Press:

We recently partnered with the Duluth News Tribune on a three-part, data-driven story on abuse of prescription narcotics, with an emphasis on

adolescents. In 2007/8, we partnered with Politico on events surrounding the Republican National Convention, held in St. Paul.

John Strang, WFLA-TV, Tampa:

(WFLA was one of the first stations to dedicate resources to mapping crime in the community to look for trends and offer its audience deeper, more relevant crime information. We asked Strang what had happened to this feature, branded "Crimetracker.")

Crimetracker is still a brand. We may still call a story a Crimetracker Alert, but there's no more computer component. In staff layoffs we lost that. Also, the numbers were so outdated. By the time we would get them from police, they were probably a month or more old. We tried to put crime in perspective. To be honest, now we do less of that. Now it's pretty much the victim's mother, the crime scene. What I really see us doing less of is the follow-ups; it's more one-day stories now. Sometimes in the past, the day two story would be about crime in the area and would offer perspective on what happened.

Andrew Smith, Newsday:

I suppose outsourcing is cheaper, especially if you can use college students as reporters, but I think it's a shame that more investigations can't be done in-house...One thing that gets lost when you outsource investigations is the local knowledge and contacts of beat reporters.

(During the 1970s and '80s, Newsday's vaunted investigative unit, nicknamed "The Greene Team," was led by the legendary Bob Greene, who retired in 1992 and died in 2008. The paper got a new investigations director last year in Matt Doig, who developed a solid reputation as an investigator during a decade at the Sarasota (Fla.) Herald-Tribune.)

The Milwaukee *Journal Sentinel* is one example of a newspaper that has decided to emphasize investigations, and it has paid off with multiple prize-winning series in recent years. We asked George Stanley, the paper's managing editor, about the *Journal Sentinel's* strategy:

We believe that to thrive and survive today, when we're competing with so many others for our readers' time, we must deliver news and information they can't get anywhere else. We can do in-depth investigative and explanatory reporting like no one else in our region. It's our most important job, as watchdogs of those in power, and it's what our readers are most about, according to surveys and anecdotal feedback...The most rewarding thing to come out of all the cutting of the past several years -- which did force us to sharpen our focus on the most important things and give up less important functions -- is to learn from our readers that we can please them most by aiming for excellence and producing the best damn journalism we know how to do.

#

David J. Krajicek is a contributing editor of The Crime Report (TCR). A true crime author and former journalism professor, he is co-editor of Crime & Justice News, published by TCR and Criminal Justice Journalists; and a crime columnist for the New York Daily News. Debra Wenger, an Assistant Professor of Journalism at the University of Mississippi and a member of the board of Criminal Justice Journalists, is a former assistant news director at WFLA-TV Tampa, and co-author of “Advancing the Story: Broadcast Journalism in a Multimedia World.” Her Twitter handle is @dhwenger

The Center on Media, Crime and Justice at John Jay College gratefully acknowledges the support of the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation for this study