

The Times, they are a-changing

YOU MAY NOT REALIZE IT, BUT RIGHT NOW, we're seeing the beginnings of a new kind of Renaissance. But rather than falling apples and optics, the catalyst of today's change comes in the digital format of the Internet.

It's making quiet ripples that may seem small, but which are quickly expanding into tidal waves of revolutionary proportions, and at the epicentre of its impact are some of the key industries that shape the way our culture and society function. Perhaps one of the enterprises most affected by these torrents has been the mainstream media. The past two years have seen exponential shifts in the methods of information dispersal, and the media is finding itself at a critical junction on the information highway.

Yesterday at midnight, the *New York Times* cracked open its digital vaults and removed the subscription fee program from its website. The program, which was started two years ago, previously allowed online readers access to the *Times* at a yearly fee of \$49.95, or \$7.95 US a month. While some sections of the site were already publicly available—though they offered total access to the paper's print subscribers—op/ed and archived articles were kept under virtual lock-and-key to non-paying visitors.

This decision marks a progressive move by one of the major players in the media field. For years, newspaper print circulation has been declining while online readership expands, forcing publishers to take a side in a widening chasm in the way that media is distributed. The rift is getting wider, too, and publications are being forced to make crucial changes in an "adapt-or-die" kind of world.

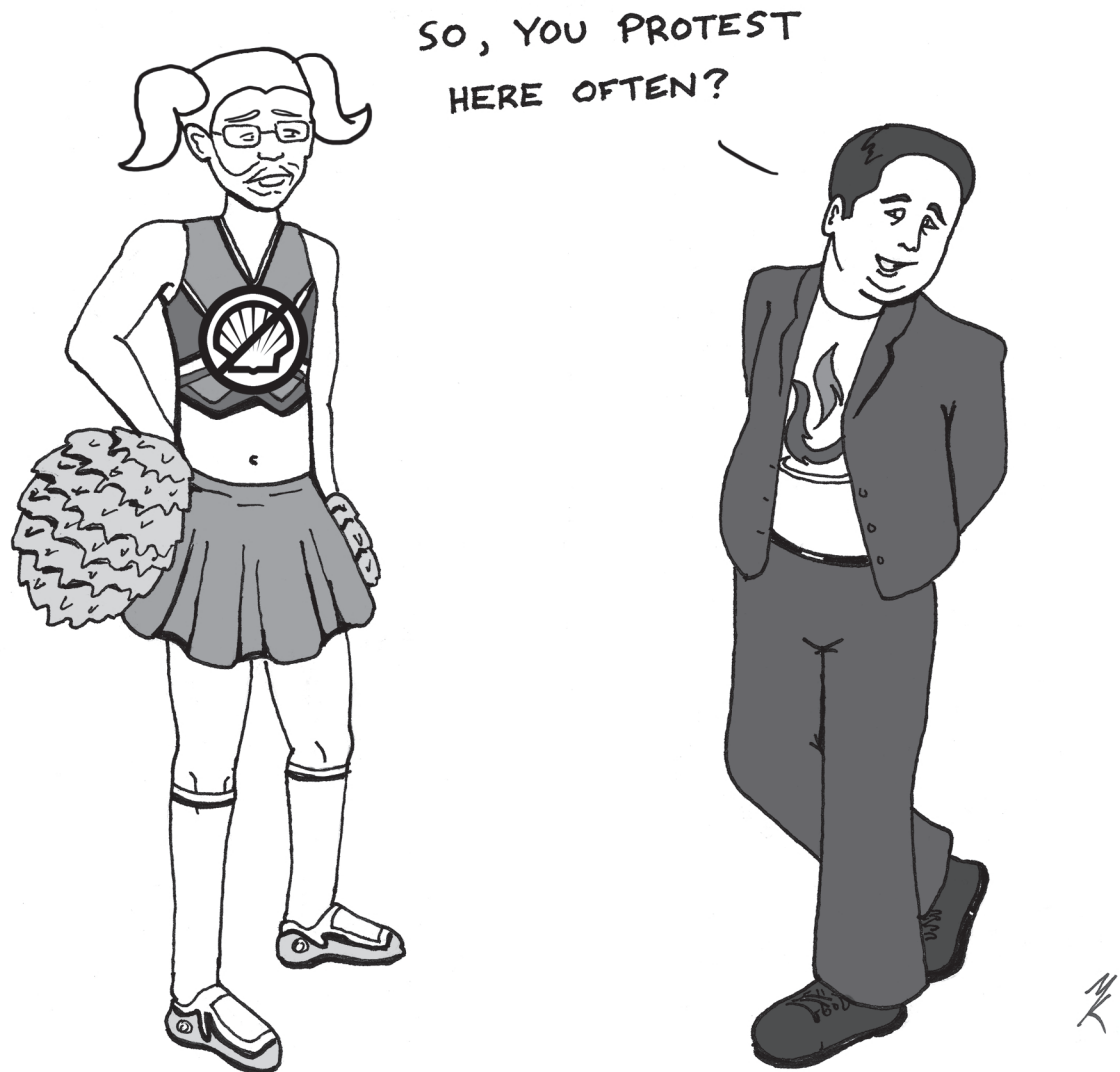
Early adopters to the new media include the technology gurus at *Wired* magazine, who've been making headway for years in changing the shape of their product, and have recently finished a complete overhaul of both their print and online editions. Not far behind, the *Globe and Mail* has followed suit, offering a slick online interface to their readers, while only locking down "premium" to non-subscribers.

On the other side of the fence, the *Wall Street Journal* insists on maintaining a traditional stance on the way they market their newspaper, remaining the only major American newspaper to continue to charge for its online content—a practice it's been carrying out since 1996.

It's easy to argue from an ideological stance when discounting business tactics, but in reality, the shift to open online content is a logical move for the bankers too. Subscription programs have proven to be immensely successful throughout the 21st Century in the marketing of print media, but the shift to the web has been met with mixed results. Especially with the way that the Internet is evolving now, there's a demand for open access to instant information. While some users may simply not subscribe to the idea of paying real money for virtual information, most web surfers get their data fix from a variety of sources, and know that if the content is unavailable at one site, the same story can be found only a click away on that of its competitor. This, combined with the successful and lucrative new methods being installed by online advertisers, means that the potential long-term revenues by-and-large outweigh the short-term profits of subscription systems.

While the profit venture may have been the primary—if not only—motivation for the *Times*, it's a convenient matter of coincidence for publishers, advertisers, and readers alike. Open access builds loyalty in a reader base, while encouraging expansive distribution. As articles freely circulate among Google searches and user-driven news aggregators like Digg—two of the most common methods of online information dispersal—the demand for easy-to-access content is ever-growing and is quickly becoming a major source of new readership. There's simply nothing to gain from blocking online access to readily available information. So good on the *Times* for their proactive business decision. It's only a matter of, well, time until the rest of the pack begins to immitate.

MIKE KENDRICK
Design & Production Editor



MIKE KENDRICK

LETTERS

Freedom of speech being silenced by tasing

I am appalled by what I witnessed on YouTube last night. I don't know if you're aware, but a great injustice was committed against the core freedoms that we as members of liberal-democracies value most.

This injustice happened not in a prison camp, nor under a dictator's regime, but rather in the sacred halls of education at the University of Florida. I'm writing about the arrest and tasing of UF student Andrew Meyer by campus police at a John Kerry Q & A forum on Monday. This came about not because the student was causing anyone harm, but because he was asking questions.

While being apprehended, Meyer asked what he had done, but the campus police refused to tell him. He even offered to leave the building, but 5-0 insisted on stunning him, and only once he was being escorted out of the building did they tell him that he was being arrested for inciting a riot.

As anyone who has seen the video can attest, there was no riot happening at the forum; in fact, no one seemed to be doing anything. John Kerry asked for everyone to "cool down" and even attempted to answer the question, but no one tried to stop the police.

I think the most ironic part of the story is that it happened on Monday, 17 September 2007, which means this took place 220 years to the day of the signing of the US Constitution, in which the First Amendment gives its citizens the right to freedom of speech.

This whole story begs us to ask the question relevant to our own

University experience: could it happen here? It's crucial for us at the U of A to have a healthy debate on the subject in order to preserve our essential rights, maybe in the structure of a Q & A town forum; the one thing I ask however, is that campus Five-O refrains from bringing tasers.

DANIEL BELBAS
Arts II

If Britney wants to play ball, she'd better shape up

I find it odd that "M Snider" considers it off limits to critique Britney Spears for being out of shape at her recent VMA performance. Sure, by ordinary standards, she was in decent physical condition, but ordinary people aren't being paid millions of dollars (re: "Girls not angry for once," 18 September).

What exactly does Britney do to earn her paycheck? She lip-syncs through her performances, as many of her recent "comeback" shows have displayed. She has choreographers to arrange her dance moves, and all of her songs are co-written with at least one other person. She doesn't seem to play an instrument, and using her fame for some kind of meaningful advocacy appears to be beyond her ability. Let's face it: Britney Spears is being paid to look good while all the real work is done by other people.

It's the same standard of judgment used against all individuals who are paid obscene amounts of money for God-given talents. When sports stars who are paid millions to be the fastest and the strongest let themselves get out of shape, they're held accountable, and rightfully so.

I see no reasons why Britney Spears deserves to be treated any

differently. She stepped back onto the field at the Video Music Awards and couldn't even keep up with her backup dancers.

Fair game? I think so.

JANELLE NEED
Arts III

Bear Scat could be turned over to the invisible paw

What surprises me about the current debate surrounding Bear Scat is the complete lack of cold-hearted capitalism.

Rather than rely on the Student's Union to once again fail to provide for the desires of students, why not turn Bear Scat into a subscription service? With outside investment in the infrastructure and programming, we can keep this wonderful tool alive and allow it to reach its full potential.

Even if usage declines, there'll surely be enough interest to allow the system to fund itself with nominal per user, per term subscription rates. Anyone interested in forming a Bear Scat Investors' Group shoot me an email at gv@ualberta.ca.

GERRIT VAN BRUGGEN
Arts IV

Cats a worse pet than fish

Recently one of my roommates decided that she wanted a cat. Being an animal lover, I had no issues with this, and I supported her in acquiring a feline addition to our household because hell, I'd always had dogs around when I lived at home, so how would this be any different? Well boys and girls, to my surprise it is. It's much fucking different.

Despite the constant mewing, demands for food, vicious claw attacks on my feet when I'm sleeping, rude awakenings with a cat's asshole

in my face, and the constant clawing up of the couches, the biggest beef I have with this damn animal isn't what it does, but instead what it lacks.

Like I mentioned before, I've been a dog person all my life. I'm used to the happy greetings, the fetching of objects, the constant companionship. Most of all, I'm used to the loyalty. This cat however, has none of this. It's its own fucking boss, and doesn't give a shit what you say. I mean, come on, what the hell is the point of having an animal that doesn't listen to you and has zero semblance of loyalty?

Getting a pet is about growing with it, learning from it, and teaching it sweet tricks to help your pimp-game. Last time I checked the *Guidebook for Good Pets*, it definitely didn't have a chapter about feeding it and then letting it go on its own merry fucking way.

Some people swear by these god-damn animals, and I think I know why: you're lazy. You're not willing to put in any real face time. If you want a real pet who'll give you something back, go get a dog. Cats are selfish pricks.

BRENDAN TRAYNER
Graduate Studies

Letters to the editor should be sent to letters@gateway.ualberta.ca (no attachments, please).

The Gateway reserves the right to edit letters for length and clarity, and to refuse publication of any letter it deems racist, sexist, libellous or otherwise hateful in nature. The Gateway also reserves the right to publish letters online.

Letters to the editor should be no longer than 350 words, and should include the author's name, program, year of study and student identification number to be considered for publication.