



Center of the Storm: The San Jose Mercury Center and the Origins of Online Newspapers

Dr. Loran Lewis Jr.

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For decades, the newspaper industry had been looking for an electronic alternative to hedge its bets against the predicted demise of print. Although previous attempts at electronic delivery had limited success, the industry rushed to adopt online delivery of its product via the World Wide Web in the mid-1990s. This project establishes the factors leading up to the development of the Web newspapers and uses the San Jose Mercury News and its online product, Mercury Center, to examine the impact of that newspaper upon the development of online newspapers. Using Rogers' diffusion of innovations, the Mercury News qualifies as an innovator in the diffusion of online newspapers. It was also determined that organization size and support, slack resources, and technical capabilities were important factors in the adoption process. Using a sociological perspective, this project also discovered that economic, educational, community, technological, cultural and population factors in the surrounding region played important roles in San Jose's development of an online alternative. Finally, the commitment of the newspaper to Mercury Center was influenced internally by the organization's technological background, a group of innovative employees, financial considerations and a changing newspaper industry.

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