

Epilogue and Acknowledgments

On the afternoon of March 10, 2004, I posted a draft of the Introduction and Chapter 1 of this book on my weblog. I asked readers to let me know, preferably by email, if they noticed any factual errors. I also asked whether I'd missed any crucial topics, or whether they knew of some perfect anecdote that absolutely had to be included.

They responded. One of the first emails alerted me to an incorrect web address, which I fixed immediately. Another pointed out a mistake in a section about open source software.

Others suggested I amplify certain points, or asked why I discussed a particular topic, or that I slow down the narrative. The comments section of my weblog became a discussion about the book.

The ideas I've been discussing in *We the Media* became integral to the reporting and writing of the book itself. When I started, I didn't really know what to expect. But I can say now, without any fear of contradiction, that this process has worked.

Thank you, all.

OUTLINE AND IDEAS

My version of open source journalism got off to a rocky start. In the early spring of 2003, I posted an outline of the book and invited comments by email. My inbox overflowed.

Then a small disaster hit. I'd moved all the suggestions into a separate folder in my mailbox, but several months later, when I looked for them, they were gone. Vanished. Disappeared. I still don't know if this was my doing or my Internet service provider's. Either way, I was horrified; I'd not only lost some of the excellent ideas, but I also hadn't thanked everyone who made a suggestion. Needless to say, I didn't have a current, local backup on my hard disk.

I was able to reconstruct some of the messages from an older backup and some saved replies I'd sent. But many were gone forever. Consider this my apology to all of you who are in the latter category.

But the comments I did manage to save, which arrived from all over the world, helped me firm up my ideas for this book.

One of the most thoughtful early notes was from Tom Stites, an old friend, and an editor who once hired me and later became one of my touchstones in journalism. He said, among other things:

If what you are describing is truly tomorrow's journalism, I fear that democracy is doomed. I lead with this alarmist statement because as I understand what you're describing only a tiny elite engages with political/news blogs; democracy needs a *tomorrow's journalism* that reaches and activates a broad audience. The blog elite I'm describing is not the business/government power elite but a highly educated, deeply curious insider group centered among the technologically proficient. The sad truth is, most people are passive consumers of news who, because of the insider jargon blogs tend to be written in, couldn't decipher most blogs even if they signed on; the segment of the citizenry that are savvy and proactive news-seekers is very small, and I don't expect that to change much.

Several readers wished I'd published the outline in a way that let them comment directly on it, in a Wiki or with comments enabled. I wish I had, too, because it would have simplified matters.

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Elwin Jenkins, who writes the always interesting Microdoc News, posted a cautionary suggestion saying I was looking too much at journalism. In a blog posting of his own he concluded: “Bloggers are not journalists, we are information seekers, information builders and knowledge makers. We are more like teachers than journalists.”³¹⁹ Fair enough, I thought, but then again, this book is about journalism, not the overall blogosphere. Still, the reminder of the wider context was useful.

I received suggestions on books to read, people to interview, paths to follow. One correspondent, Chris Gulker,³²⁰ wrote about “self-assembling newsrooms,” a concept that delighted me. I’ve used it in presentations and in this book.

As 2003 progressed, I used my weblog to discuss many of the concepts about which I was writing. When I saw relevant news stories I pointed at them, and posted my own observations about these micro examples of macro trends. I’d turned on the comment system by then, and readers chimed in with useful observations of their own.

DRAFTS AND OTHER POSTINGS

Before embarking on this project, I chatted with David Weinberger. I’d enjoyed his second book, *Small Pieces Loosely Joined: A Unified Theory of the Web*,³²¹ a thoughtful exploration of this medium. He’d done it in an entirely open way by posting chapter drafts on which his audience could comment.

Software developers have an expression called the “nightly build,” which is the latest update of a program. Weinberger was, in effect, posting nightly builds of his book. I asked him how the process worked.

“Don’t do that,” he warned me. It was more trouble than it was worth. Posting chapter drafts was a fine idea, he thought, but not every single change he was making. Good advice, and we took it.

A couple of days after posting drafts of the Introduction and Chapter 1 of my book, an email arrived from Stephen B. Waters, publisher of the *Rome Sentinel* in upstate New York. “If you’re interested,” he wrote, “I made the effort to comment.” Attached was a file containing Chapter 1 in Microsoft Word format, with the “Track Changes” feature turned on so I could see what changes and suggestions he’d made.³²²

Waters hadn’t just made an effort. He’d torn the thing apart, picking at small and large problems he saw. In his summary at the end, he wrote: “The time is right. The subject is right. But your book deserves to be better than this.”

After retrieving my ego from the trash, I thought about what he’d said. I called him up. In our conversation and subsequent emails, I learned something about him. He’s a computer geek who came back to his family’s newspaper business. He studied history. He loves the blogosphere and what it can do. He’s a thoughtful man with good ideas, and on some important issues, he knew more than I did. Waters took his virtual blue pencil to every chapter I posted. I carefully looked at his suggestions and incorporated many of them.

I also heard from some people whose work I’d mentioned in the book. Several offered corrections or clarifications. This was exactly what I’d hoped for, and I was thrilled with the result.

Did mistakes creep into the book as published? As I write this, I assume some did, and we’ll correct them online and in future printings. But are there fewer errors than there might have been? Unquestionably. And did more thought and nuance make its way into the book? I’m convinced it did.

My experience was, in a sense, a test of the next version of journalism. It proved workable, which was not surprising to me. I believe it can work for almost anyone.

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First, thanks to the many folks who posted comments on my blog, called, or wrote in with suggestions, comments, and corrections. Because I lost some mail, as noted earlier, I can't thank everyone individually. (If you were among that group, please let me know and I'll add your name to the list when it goes online and in future printings and/or editions.) But those whose messages I didn't lose (including several who offered only pseudonyms) include: Paul Andrews, Nick Arnett, Alfredo Ascanio, Jerry Asher, Kevin Aylward, Phil Baker, Alessio Balbi, Peter Basofin, Bill Baur, Morten Bay, Andrew Beach, Michael Bean, Tim Bishop, Charles Brownstein, Buzz Bruggeman, C.R. Bryan III, Scott Burki, Kevin Burton, Brian W. Carver, Frank Catalano, David Cassel, Gilbert Cattoire, Guillermo Cerceau, Brian Clark, Joe Clark, Michael O'Connor Clarke, Michael Collins, Joyce Conklin, Jeff Danziger, Tom Dolembro, Dave Donohue, John Dougan, Stephen Downes, Amy Eisman, Greg Elin, Mark Federman, Sean Fitzpatrick, John Fleck, Dave Fletcher, Trip Foster, Bjorn Freeman-Benson, Rhonda Geraci, Ward Gerlach, John Gilmore, Bernie Goldbach, Phil Gomes, greep, Chris Gulker, Steve Harmon, Tim Harding, Eszter Hargittai, Rodney Hoffman, Denise Howell, Ryan Irelan, Terri Irving, Joanne Jacobs, Elwin Jenkins, Nicholas Jenkins, Dennis Jerz, Morrie Johnston, Gordon Joseloff, Chris Kaminski, Rohit Khare, Susan Kitchens, Brian Krause, Tony Lacey, Geoff Langhorne, Larry Larsen, Leonard Lin, Hetty Litjens, Scott Love, Tristan Louis, Richard Lundquist, Zack Lynch, Mark McBride, Mike McCallister, Wayne Mercier, Jim Miller, Bill Mitchell, Neal Moore, Andrea Moro, Robert Niles, Maureen S. O'Brien, Mike Owens, Evan Orensky, Andrew Orłowski, Olav A Øvrebø, Nigel Parry, Angela Penny, Ralph Poole, Matt Prescott, J.P. Rangaswami, Wayne Rasanen, Celia Redmore, William Riski, Cormac Russell, Jason Salzman, Rob Salzman, Gary D. Sanders, Gary Santoro, Dan Scherlis, Trudy Schuett, Pam Schwartz, professor rat,

Janet S. Scott, Linda Seebach, Bill Seitz, Ben Silverman, Some Random Humanoid, Kathleen Spracklen, Steve Stroh, Glenn Thomas, Fons Tuinstra, Manolis Tzagarakis, Mike Banks Valentine, Ed Vielmetti, Taylor Walsh, Jonathan Weaver, Joshua Weinberg, Dan Weintraub, Alex Williams, Phil Wolff, Jay Woods, Jim Zellmer and Ethan Zuckerman.

I tended to ignore remarks that said, “Don’t quit your day job”—except when they explained why they thought so. I tend to learn more (or at least as much) from people who think I’m wrong than people who think I’m right, and when they offer reasons I pay close attention, even if we continue to disagree. Thanks to those of you (you know who you are) who challenged my assumptions, even harshly.

So many people were generous with their time. (One of the dilemmas in writing this book was whether to use first names when talking about or quoting the many friends and friendly acquaintances whose work has informed mine and therefore made it into the text; I used last names for consistency.) Among the people who have helped me understand this process, through conversations, formal interviews, and/or correspondence, are: Marko Ahtisaari, Chris Allbritton, Chris Anderson, Azeem Azhar, Jeff Bates, John Perry Barlow, Cameron Barrett, Yochai Benkler, Krishna Bharat, Shayne Bowman, Wes Boyd, Nick Bradbury, Yale Braunstein, Dan Bricklin, John Brockman, Buzz Bruggeman, Thomas N. Burg, Kevin Burton, Jason McCabe Calacanis, Mark Canter, Jerry Ceppos, Ying Chan, Joe Clark, Ed Cone, Robert Cox, David Crossen, Mark Cuban, Ward Cunningham, Rob Curley, Anil Dash, Nick Denton, Hossein Derakhshan, Betsy Devine, Samantha Dissanayake, Cory Doctorow, Jack Driscoll, Esther Dyson, Ben Edelman, Renee Edelman, Charles Eisendrath, Dave Farber, Ed Felten, Rusty Foster, Karl Frisch, Glenn Fleishman, Adam Gaffin, Jock Gill, Steve Gillmor, Wiley Gillmor, Mark Glaser, Vindu Goel, Phil Gomes, Amy Goodman, Rich Gordon, Jennifer Granick, Matt Gross, Tara Sue Grubb, Justin Hall, Jay Harris, Peter Harter, Matt Haughey, Scott Hiefferman, Mary Hodder, Meg

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I interviewed some of these people first for columns that ran in the *San Jose Mercury News* (some material from which appears in this book) and at SiliconValley.com, an online affiliate of the newspaper and our parent company, Knight Ridder. If my good and talented colleagues thought I was crazy to try this, they were kind enough not to say so. Special thanks to my *Mercury News* editors, who let me go on a part-time schedule while I worked on this project.

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Tim O'Reilly, the founder and chief executive of O'Reilly Media, publisher of this book, constantly impresses me with his rare combination of intellect and generosity of spirit. When I described the idea to him in 2002, he immediately said he'd like to publish the book but thought I'd do better financially with an East Coast house. I struck out in New York despite the efforts of a fine literary agency. I'm glad, in retrospect, because working with Tim and his team—including Rael Dornfest, Betsy Waliszewski, Sara Winge and their colleagues—has been an absolute pleasure.

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Noriko Takiguchi is a never-ending well of calm and joy. She put up with my absurdly long hours—including months of an alarm clock buzzing at absurdly early hours—and pushed me to get my butt in gear when I got lazy. She makes me sane. She lights my life.