

Where is Everyone?

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Key Words

Media
Communications
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Information

Summary

These days everyone is trying to connect with other people. It used to be simple, but in these technological times it is a little more complicated! We are currently in the midst of the most drastic change since the invention of the newspaper. In this article we are going to take a tour through the history of information, based on a year-long gathering of anecdotal evidence and we will try to answer some questions, e.g., how do we connect with other people today, and more importantly, how will we do it tomorrow?

Prologue

This study is not based on bulletproof quantitative data, guesswork or personal opinions, but on a combination of many things, including interviews, general studies, general trends and anecdotal evidence. The graphs covering the period before 1990 are all based on interviews and many Google searches to learn about the history of newspapers, TV and

radio — and more specifically, which methods of information gathering people used in the past. The graphs covering the period from 1998 and up to today are based on all the things that have happened in the past 11 years, concerning which I have probably seen 1000 surveys. The graph for 2009 and forward is based on what I, and many other people, predict will happen in the years to come. The graphs are not intended to be 100% accurate, but rather to give an idea of

the changing landscape, and to prepare for the future of social news, targeted information and the like. The purpose of the article is to push people forward. That said, I do believe they are reasonably accurate.

Introduction

We are seeing an entirely new way for people to interact; one that makes all traditional ways seem trivial. It is a fundamental shift

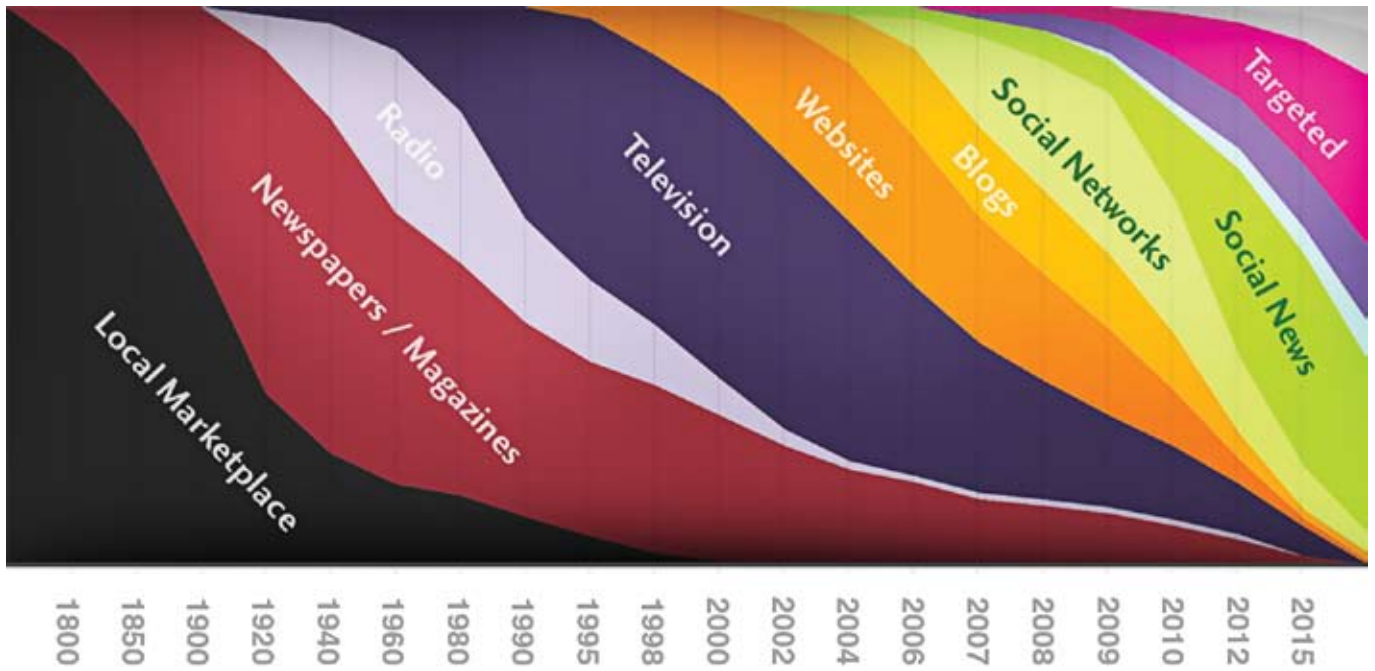


Figure 1. An overview of the changing trends in the media, 1800s to (predicted) 2020 and beyond. Note the non-linear time scale.

that will completely change the world as we know it. The best thing about it is that you will be able to help make it happen. So join me on this tour of the last 210 years of information sources plus a glimpse ten years ahead (Figure 1).

Before we start to explore the future, let's see how we reached the present. We'll begin by going back to 1800 — when finding out information was very different.

1800 — The face-to-face period

In the 1800s (Figure 2), the only way you could really interact with other people was to go out and meet them. It was all about face-to-face communication. To sell a product, you would go to the local marketplace and, in general, the only way to interact was to meet in person or to set up a stall. This meant for you to receive information — or to give it — you had to be at the right place at the right time. You wouldn't know what

was happening in another part of the city, nor could you sell your products to people in other places. There was some talk of a novel concept called a newspaper...

By the year 1900 (Figure 3), newspapers and magazines had revolutionised how we communicated, allowing us to get news from places where we had never been. We could communicate our ideas to people we had never seen and sell our products to others far away.

You still had to go out to talk other people, but you could stay on top of things without leaving your own city. It was amazing; the first real information revolution. The world was opening up to everyone.

1900 — Read all about it!

From the 1920s on a new source of information caught people's attention — the radio. Suddenly you could listen to another

person's voice hundreds of miles away. But most importantly, you could get the latest information live. It was another tremendous evolutionary step in the history of information. However, radio's development time meant that newspapers still dominated our lives in the years preceding the 1960s. If you wanted to get the latest news, or to tell people about your product, you would turn to the newspapers. It seemed as if they would surely be the dominant source of information for ever more.

1960 — We will be right back after these messages

This situation began to change in the 1960s (Figure 4). Radio had caught on, and the two dominant sources of information were live news from the radio and the more detailed news via newspapers and magazines. It was a great time for the media, although some said that "the way for newspapers to meet the competition of



Figure 2. 1800, the age of local marketplace media.



Figure 3. Newspapers gain popularity in the 1900s.

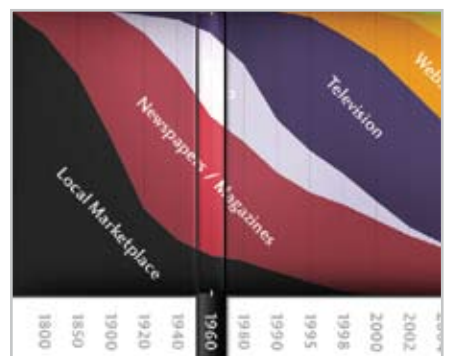


Figure 4. The emergence of radio in the 1960s.

radio is simply to produce better papers”, an argument that we would hear repeatedly for the next 50 years.

1990 — Tune in to tomorrow

During the next 40 years the next technical revolution, television (Figure 5), was introduced. It began to gain public interest in the 1950s, and by the early 1990s its presence was huge, effectively surpassing newspapers and magazines whilst dominating the radio. Now people could both hear and see information.

The 1970s–1990s was also the time when newspaper executives realised that something was going terribly wrong with their market. They had had many problems in competing with radio, but television was in a different league again.

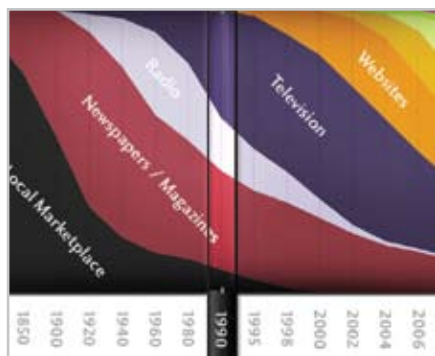


Figure 5. The 1990s, a popular time for television.

1998 — The dawn of the internet

Only eight years later and television ruled the information world (figure 6), radio had been almost reduced to “a place where you can listen to free music”, and newspapers were doing everything they could to stay relevant. The constant evolution of technology ploughed ahead with never-before-seen determination. A new phenomenon loomed in the shadows: the internet.

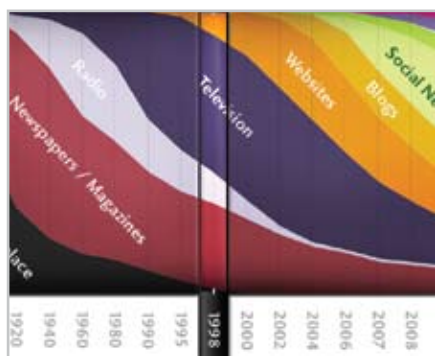


Figure 6. 1998, and the internet makes its presence felt.

1998 was the year when the internet changed from being a geeky place that had little relevance to being arguably essential, with an “every company needs to have a website” philosophy. The revolution had started three years earlier, but in 1998 it reached critical mass and caught everyone’s attention, even if it was relatively little-used and most people did not have access to it. However, everyone agreed that it was the future; the dawn of a new era. It was a place where anyone could get information from anywhere — at least in theory.

People also started to realise that the internet was more than just information. You could give something back by joining the conversation and being a part of the experience instead of just a spectator. Most importantly, you could choose what you wanted to do and when you wanted to do it. The possibilities of the internet were mind-boggling.

2004 — I decide what to do!

In 2004, only six years later, and the internet had revolutionised how we approached information. Television and newspapers still dominated our news sources, but the new world was definitely online (Figure 7). People were making new websites and exploring the world of web applications. People could do such an incredible amount and participate in so many areas that a new concept appeared: information overload. For the first time in our lives we were being exposed to more information than we could consume. In the age of newspapers we had to choose what we wanted to see. In 2004 we had to choose what we didn’t want to see.

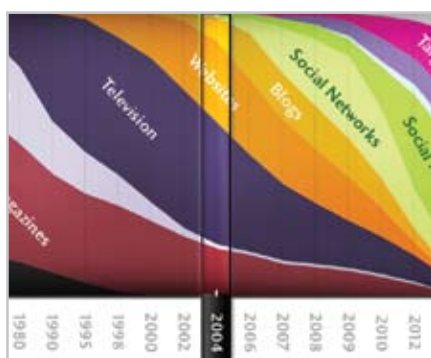


Figure 7. 2004, and the birth of social networking.

This had a devastating effect on the traditional forms of information. In the past you could get people’s attention simply by making something. People wanted more choice, so you simply had to give them another option. In 2004 this changed, as it was not enough to make something different; it had to be better.

2004 was also year when another new phenomenon started to take off: social networking. The concept had been slowly gaining ground with the concept of blogs. They were an easy, simple and affordable way for everyone to share their ideas. For the first time, anyone could create their own sphere of information without doing anything “technical”. Handling information changed from being a tool for the professionals to a tool for anyone.

2007 — Me too

Three years later and the social element of the internet showed just how powerful the voice of the people really is. For the first time television was no longer the primary source of information, and newspapers were struggling to survive. Everyone wanted to create their own little world, and connect it to their friends (Figure 8). 2007 was also the turning point for traditional websites, with people comparing them to newspapers — a static and passive form of information. We wanted active information. We wanted to be a part of it, not just to look at it.

Blogs started to get into trouble. Just as television had eliminated radio (because it was a better and richer way to give people live information), so were social networks eliminating blogs. A social profile is a more active way for people to share what they care about. Social networks are simply the best tool for the job, and blogs could not keep up.

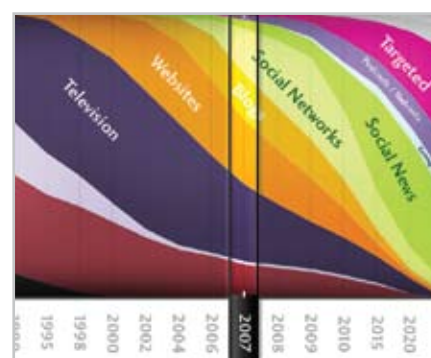


Figure 8. 2007, a turning point for new media.

2009 — Everything is social

Two years later, today, the new internet dominates our world completely (Figure 9). Newspapers are dead in the water, and people are watching less television than ever. We are the new kings of information, using social networking tools to connect and communicate. Even the traditional website is dying, killed by the relentless force of constant streaming information from social networks.

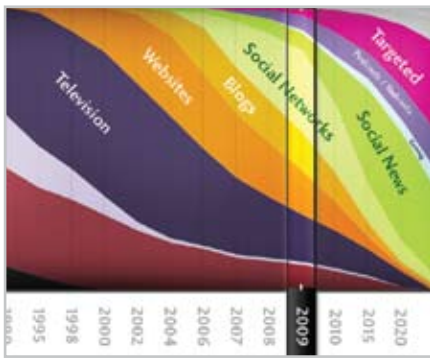


Figure 9. Social networks booming in 2009.

In the past 210 years we have seen an amazing evolution in how we obtain information. The principal forward steps are:

1. Getting information from distant places.
2. Getting it live.
3. Seeing it live.
4. Deciding when to see something, and what to see.
5. Being able to take part and comment.
6. Publishing our own information.
7. Being the source of information.

2009 will be the start of the next revolution. Everything we know is about to change.

The future

The first and most dramatic change is the concept of social news. This is quickly taking over our need to stay up to date with what goes on in the world. News is no longer being reported by journalists, as now it comes from anyone and everyone. It is being reported directly from the source to you — bypassing the traditional media channels.

Social news is much more than that. It is increasingly about getting news directly from the people who make it. Instead of having a journalist report what analysts are saying, you hear it from the analyst herself. Social news is getting news from the source, directly and unfiltered.

A new wave of entertainment is emerging (the light blue and purple areas on the graph), one dominated by the games, video and audio streams. Instead of tuning into a

television channel, you decide what to see and when to see it. We no longer subscribe to channels where someone else decides what you can see. You control everything about the experience.

A new concept in the form of targeted information is slowly emerging. We are already seeing an increasing number of services on mobile phones that provide local information for the area that you are in. For example, instead of showing all the restaurants in the world, the phone will only show a list of those in your area. This is something that will explode in the years to come. In a world where we have access to more information that we can consume, getting the relevant information is going to be a very important element, expanding far beyond the simple geo-targeting that we see today.

2020 — Traditional is dead

Over the next five to ten years, the world of information will change (Figure 10). All the traditional forms will essentially die. Printed newspapers will no longer exist, television in the form of preset channels will be replaced by single shows that you can watch whenever you like. Radio shows are destined to be replaced with podcasts and vodcasts.

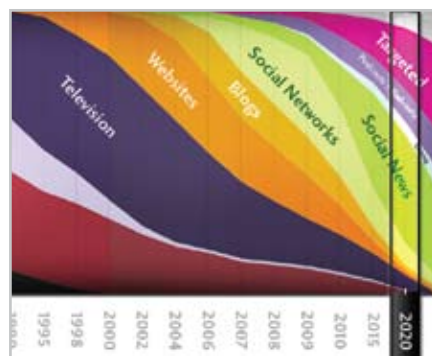


Figure 10. Predicting the future of the media communication methods.

Websites will have a much smaller role, as their primary function will be to serve as a hub for all the activities that you do elsewhere, becoming the place where people get the raw material for use in other places. Many websites and social networks will merge into one.

Social news, as described previously, is going to be the main way that people communicate. Traditional journalism will be completely superseded as people get information directly from the source. Everyone is a potential reporter, but new

advances in targeting will eliminate most of the noise. Journalists will become editors who, instead of reporting the news, will bring it together to give us a bigger picture.

The news stream of the future will be personalised, and will constantly adjust what you see — much in the same way as Last.fm is doing today with music. Everything will incorporate some form of targeting. You will be in control over every single bit of information that flows your way.

In 2010, two new concepts will start to emerge. One of them is intelligent information, where information streams can combine pieces from many different news sources, not just by pulling data, but by summarising it, breaking it apart and extracting the valuable parts. Instead of reading five different articles on the same topic, you will be presented with one, highlighting the vital points of interest.

The world's information will also be available almost anywhere (Figure 11). The concept of going to get the paper, sitting in front of your television set, or looking at your computer, will be long gone. Information will not be something you have to get, but rather something that comes to you, wherever you are, in whatever situation you happen to be in. In the same way, information will not be something you "consume" at a certain time, as you did with prime-time television. The information stream will be a natural part of every second of your life. It is not something you fetch, it is something you have. The static and controlled forms of information that we see today will soon be a thing of the past.

Get ready!

Ask yourself: are you still trying to get journalists to write about your products? Are you still making websites? Is your social networking strategy to "get a Facebook page"? Or are you making yourself a natural part of people's stream of information?

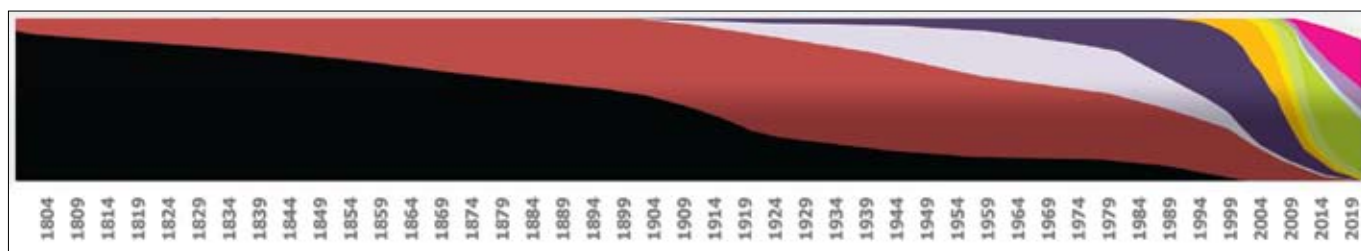


Figure 11. An overview of the changing trends in the media, 1800s to (predicted) 2020 and beyond using a linear scale.

Biography

Thomas Baekdal is a writer, social media advocate and owner of Baekdal.com, an online magazine that explores what it means to create a great experience. He works as a project manager and internet manager for one of Scandinavia's largest clothing companies. He also helps people and businesses to create a better internet strategy, and — on occasion — helps with implementation. As part of his job Thomas spends a lot of time working with internet trends and analysing why we react the way we do online. Many of his articles are the result of that work, or his speculations based on the trends that he sees every day.



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