

Reorganizing Task Force Report

July 10, 2008

**Rajah Bose
Nick Eaton
Parker Howell
Brian Immel
Carly McElligott
Emily Moore
Kathryn Smith
Andrew Zahler**

Summary

The following reorganization plan is meant to further The Spokesman-Review's goal of producing news that best serves our community, given current personnel.

Streamlining the Workflow

To efficiently run a newsroom that is dedicated to publishing content online, the deadline model for a traditional morning newspaper must be abandoned. With the traditional model, city reporters turn in their stories close to – or even after – a 5 or 6 p.m. deadline, creating an editing bottleneck at the City Desk. These stories are then immediately pushed through the copy editing procedure and into the print paper, with minimal priority given to publishing them online earlier. Meanwhile, throughout in the day, there is pressure to get stories online before they are thoroughly copy edited.

To diminish these problems, the newsroom should operate as an afternoon paper would, though The Spokesman-Review will remain a morning newspaper. Except for anyone working on breaking news or daily sports stories, reporters will have a deadline of **noon**. Similar to an afternoon newspaper, reporters will work on a story the afternoon prior to its due date, then polish it the next morning if need be. After turning in the story, the reporter will be able to take a lunch before starting a new story.

Reporters who already operate on noon deadlines will be required to turn in their stories one day earlier, allowing sufficient time for page design.

To assure content is edited before being published online, more copy editors will be required during the day. Copy editors on the newly created universal copy desk and the Sports Department will still be required during the night, but in fewer numbers. Breaking news and sports stories produced in the evening will be subject to the current deadlines. Breaking news coverage should not be curtailed.

This deadline change will:

- alleviate the bottleneck that currently mars the end of desk editors' shifts;
- allow stories to be edited more evenly throughout the afternoon;
- provide a steady stream of stories that can be published online throughout the afternoon;
- encourage more teamwork while content is in production because more people are working during the afternoon;
- encourage reporters to take a step back from a story – sleep on it – before finishing it the morning before deadline, resulting in more complete and thoughtful content;
- in some cases, enable editors the option of assigning art to an unexpectedly riveting story after it has been written;
- reduce stress in the workplace and allow reporters the option of going home early, as long as they finish their story in the morning.

Content would be copy edited throughout the afternoon, resulting in a smoother design and production process at night as the press deadline nears. This system also would alleviate deadline pressures on page designers and allow more time for thoughtful design at night. The night copy editors would then be more available to look closely at page proofs.

Because stories are in the works a day earlier than in the traditional model, all editors in the local department would be required to use the same budgeting tool. This, along with seating all of the content editors in a central pod – similar to the current setup – would provide better awareness among editors of content in production. Communication is critical.

The central editors pod would include the following:

- local editor
- assistant local editor – breaking news
- assistant local editor – Washington hyperlocal
- assistant local editor – Idaho (working from Coeur d’Alene)
- assistant local editor – watchdog
- assistant local editor – money
- assistant local editor – life
- assistant local editor – culture
- sports editor
- presentation editor
- two desks for visuals editors
- radio editor
- online producers

Local Department

To address concerns that reporters are not getting enough time with editors, that copy gets jammed during the editing process, that there are not enough reporters available and that writers are duplicating work on stories, editors will work together on a universal assignments desk. The new Local Department will encompass the former City, Business, Features, 7 and Voices desks. The head of this desk will be a “strong” city editor – addressing another staff concern that the city editor has less power than in past years – who will oversee selection and assignment of stories for all of the sections, read as many stories as possible and report to the managing editor. Line editing and supervision of reporters will lie with seven non-SES assistant local editors: breaking, life, culture, watchdog, money and Washington hyperlocal and Idaho hyperlocal. To increase communication, these editors will sit in a central editors pod in the newsroom, with the exception of one editor in Idaho; the pod also will include representatives of all other departments.

This structure noticeably removes assistant managing editors across the board, placing greater authority in the hands of the local editor. The editor in chief and managing editor will continue their present duties.

Flexibility is key to this organization. Instead of section editors drawing from a set pool of reporters to fill one part of the paper, editors will assign stories to the reporter best suited for a

specific task. (For example, a story about renovations at Avista Stadium might involve a business-oriented reporter, a sports reporter or a hyperlocal reporter.) The local editor and assistant editors will decide what runs in each section during morning and afternoon meetings. This means more existing City reporters' work will appear in the Voices, and vice versa. Instead of assigning two reporters to cover stories for both A1/Northwest and the Voices, reporters and editors will communicate with a universal budgeting tool; with limited resources, it's not prudent to report two angles of the same story.

As a result of this structure, reporters and editors will all share weekend and holiday responsibilities, thus removing the burden on traditional City Desk staff.

Assistant local editors' responsibilities are detailed below:

- Breaking – Supervises five reporters covering morning breaking news, night breaking news, courts, public safety and general assignment. All five will share public safety duties, with morning and night reporters focusing on daily stories and the courts and public safety reporters emphasizing investigative reporting and consequential court cases. This editor will be highly trained in updating Web content.
- Life – Oversees six reporters covering food; visual and performing arts; trends (design, gardening, hobbies, etc.); movies, books and restaurants; popular culture, nightlife and music; and the outdoors. Responsible for facilitating planning of the 7 section. The outdoors reporter will oversee planning for the Outdoors section
- Culture – Supervises four reporters covering people/faith/Native American; health; social services/aging; and environment, as well as two newsroom columnists.
- Watchdog – Supervises six reporters covering K-12 education, higher education, city/county government, investigative, Washington Legislature and Idaho Legislature.
- Money – Supervises five reporters covering growth/real estate/retail reporter, economic development/tourism/finance, tech/manufacturing/labor and natural resources/mining/energy and politics/military.
- Idaho hyperlocal – Based in Idaho, oversees three reporters assigned to North Idaho beats (two in Coeur d'Alene/Hayden and one in Post Falls/Rathdrum/Sandpoint) as well as correspondents. Along with Washington hyperlocal, responsible for facilitating planning for various Voices.
- Washington hyperlocal – Oversees three reporters, one assigned to the West Plains and two to Spokane Valley/Liberty Lake, as well as correspondents.
- Wire – This SES employee culls world, national, regional, business, arts and features wires, creating a wire budget, and choosing stories that will fill various sections. This relieves copy editors of that duty.

All editors will be trained in publishing material on the Web site. Reporters will turn stories in to CCI. Their primary editors will try to read their stories first, but other editors will give first and second edits as needed.

Reporters will continue to voluntarily assume additional methods of telling stories, such as photography and videography. Reporters who choose to do so will gather raw material and edit it as they see fit, but that visual content will be subject to approval by the Visual Department, ensuring quality control. Shooting video to accompany other reporters' stories will be handled by the Visuals Department. However, expectations for people with video equipment will be set to make the most of this investment.

Sports Department

Because of the specialization of sports reporting and sports copy editing, this department will remain mostly intact. However, a staff member will be added to the sports copy desk and the sports editor will join the central editors pod. This will facilitate better communication between the Sports Department and the Local, Visuals, Online and other departments and help assign stories to the most appropriate section. Game stories and breaking news will still primarily go to the Sports section, but features, especially with hyperlocal angles, will be available to the local news and Voices sections. The sports editor will also use the universal online budgeting tool.

The sports multimedia producer will move to the Visuals Department. The sports reporters will have more clearly defined beats and will work at the office that best suits their beat instead of defaulting to the Valley.

An additional staff member will join the sports copy desk. Since the sports copy editors will not be part of the universal copy desk, this will help them publish sports stories online. The sports editor and assistant sports editor also will be trained in publishing material to the Web site.

Presentation Department

The presentation editor will oversee two designers, two graphic artists and 11 copy editors. Current day and night desk copy editors will be combined into a single pool, overseen by two copy desk chiefs whose shifts are staggered from each other. Copy for all sections of the newspaper, with the exception of Sports, will go through the universal desk.

Rather than have designated day and night copy editors, all copy editors will work 10-hour days, four days a week, and their shifts will be staggered to cover a flow of work throughout the day. This means each copy editor might be responsible for two specific jobs each day. These responsibilities will be clarified in the scheduling process and will likely vary from day to day for most copy editors. Stories will be copy edited before being posted on the Web, resulting in fewer copy editors working until deadline for print.

Ideally, copy editors will sit at a physical universal copy desk, with everyone in the same room. This desk will be close to the designers and graphic artists to facilitate communication.

Copy editing will be handled entirely by this desk, allowing two dedicated page designers.

On days when multiple sections, such as the Voices, are produced, staggered shifts will create a better workflow to prevent bottlenecks, and in the case of Voices, enable stories to be shared across Voice editions without confusion.

Voices design and copy editing duties will be more clearly separated. Two people from the universal desk can handle design of the Voices if copy editing of the stories is spread out. This will eliminate current duplication of work that occurs in Voices production (e.g., four copy editors designing, copy editing and writing a headline for the same story four different times for four different Voices).

Because wire editing will be done by the Local Department, the person on the desk in charge of design for the nation/world section will not have to spend time selecting stories. This person will be responsible, however, for checking the wires for updates and breaking news. This is similar to how the business section is currently produced.

Staffing breakdown:

- One presentation editor (no change)
- Two designers (no change)
- Two graphic artists (one is a current position; current part-time copy editor/part-time graphics job would become full-time graphics)
- Two copy desk chiefs (current news editor and deputy news editor; these two chiefs would have equal authority and both report to the presentation editor)
- Eleven copy editors (3 current day copy editors; 5 current night copy editors (after moving one to graphics); one job absorbed from current Voices staff; one job absorbed from editorial assistant pool; one job absorbed from letters coordinator position)

Online Department

The Online Department will be overseen by an online editor who supervises an online developer, three online producers and a blog coordinator.

The online developer will be in charge of writing code for and troubleshooting spokesmanreview.com, spokane7.com and future online endeavors.

Two of the online producers will work day shifts, coordinating with Local Department editors and the photo and video editors to enhance the Web report. The producers would create, edit or package content including audio, video, slideshows documents, links to previous coverage and other interactive features. If the amount of work justifies it, these producers could work overlapping schedules that cover the weekends (for example, Sunday through Thursday and Tuesday through Saturday).

Each producer will be assigned to work primarily with certain editors and their reporters. For example, one producer might be assigned to the hyperlocal, breaking and business areas of coverage. Within these assignments, producers will take an active role in advance multimedia planning with editors and reporters. The producers also will take ownership of training reporters and editors within their areas. Optimally, each group of reporters (i.e. those under a single editor) will have at least one member who is exceptionally comfortable with multimedia. And each editor in the Local Department will be able to publish stories, photos and multimedia on the Web.

These producers will be expected to help the local desk copy edit stories, write headlines and post to the Web as needed.

The third producer will be a utility player of sorts, working from 2 to 10 p.m. On that shift, the producer will be in charge of editing and posting stories, maintaining the home page and enhancing stories with multimedia. This person will also fill some roles typically performed by a night assistant city editor, primarily editing late stories, monitoring the scanner and helping the copy desk keep track of breaking news.

Finally, the Online Department will include a blog coordinator. This person, chosen from among our experienced bloggers, will help train new recruits and act as a resource for running a successful blog. The coordinator also will help the online director conduct a review of existing Spokesman-Review and 7 blogs. During this review, the director and coordinator will help senior editors establish guidelines for blogs and how they should be run. Staff members will also repitch their blogs to clarify purpose and focus. None of these tasks should prevent the coordinator from keeping up his or her blog as usual.

Visuals Department (photo and multimedia)

To help curb increasing problems of inconsistent communication among current story producers and editors and the photo and multimedia departments, the two visual departments will be combined. The new visuals editor will oversee two assignment editors who will manage photography and video personnel. This should help prevent multiple photographers and multimedia producers from covering the same event.

By filtering photo and video assignments through the same department, content will consistently be assigned to the appropriate medium. Within this department, photographers and multimedia producers will still maintain a preferred medium, but overall the photographers will be exposed to the day-to-day operations of multiplatform storytelling.

The title changes also come with a physical move of the multimedia staff into the existing Photo Department to improve communication. This change creates a more cohesive assignment system.

To further open the lines of communication with other departments, the central editors pod will have two desks for the three visual editors to rotate through.

From this desk, video and photo content that is being delivered from other sources outside the department, such as reporters or readers, will be considered.

Editorial page department

This department will consist of one editorial page editor and two assistant editorial page editors/writers. The letters coordinator position will become a copy editor position, working on the universal desk.

Radio Department

The Radio Department will remain the same, but the radio editor will join the central editors pod.

Vox

The current Vox adviser position will remain unchanged.

Administration

The following two positions will remain unchanged: administrative assistant and assistant to the editor for administration.

Support Staff

To alleviate the overburdened copy desk and utilize support staff more efficiently, the number of editorial assistants that the chief editorial assistant supervises will drop from six to five – three downtown, one in the Valley, one in Idaho – and three library readers. One downtown office assistant will move to the copy desk, and the remaining assistants will share those tasks. There will no longer be a dedicated 7 editorial assistant.

The remaining editorial assistants will be trained to cover Web cleanup (such as making sure stories export correctly from CCI to the Web, headlines are correct, etc.) and other online tasks as needed.

Additional suggestions:

The following ideas were regarded as outside the main focus of this task force but worthy of consideration.

Consensus suggestions:

- Move the Voices to Monday, replacing the traditional paper. The back page of the Voices

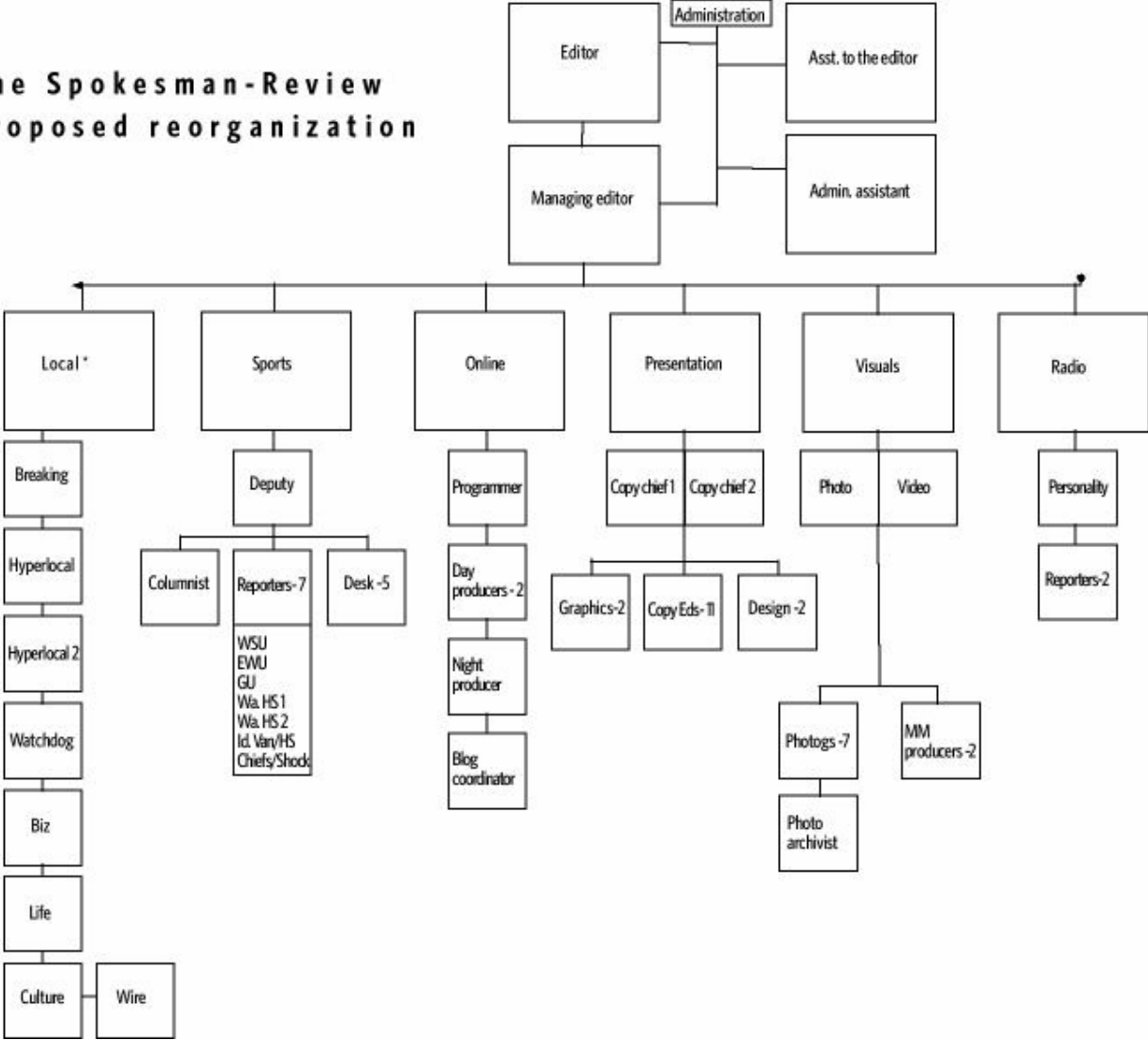
will be live sports content, produced Sunday night. Subscribers still get a paper on Monday, but the S-R can reduce Sunday night staffing and save production costs. There will be a protocol in place to create a wrap for the section if something major happens on a Sunday night and the S-R feels the need to put out a few pages to cover an extremely significant breaking story. Sunday reporting shift eliminated or becomes hybrid online producer.

- Refine and create clear job descriptions so employees know where to spend their time and what is expected of them, especially regarding online duties.
- Move people to the office that best suits their beat or job description; eliminate moves perceived as punishment by some staff.
- Less coverage of car crashes and mundane crimes, more compelling stories. Get away from the push to get a story first and toward telling a particular story well.
- Revamp the 10:30 a.m. meeting. Have more conversations about quality, style and content so reporters and editors can share ideas and develop a bigger-picture sense of our coverage.
- All SES members work four 10-hour shifts to improve productivity and morale.
- Remove the online subscription wall.
- 7 has lost its edge. Set up weekly brainstorming meetings for 7, open to anyone interested, not just those who contribute to the section.

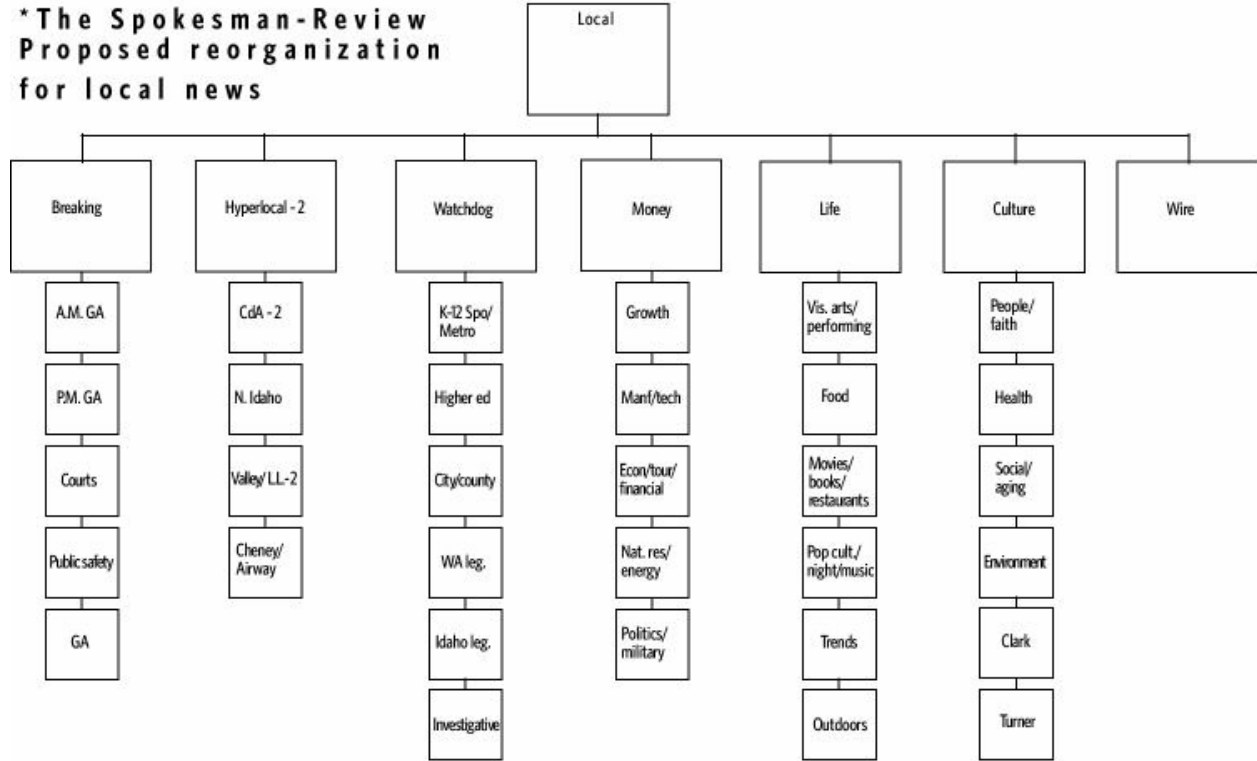
Minority suggestions:

- Reduce op/ed from two pages to one, which would include a staff-written editorial, letters, and one outside commentary or syndicated columnist (or cartoon). We're running columns on issues that we don't have space to run stories about.
- Condense nation/world news to quick hits and direct people to best sources for these stories.
- Re-emphasize alternative storytelling, such as quick hits and using more briefs.
- If 7 cannot be improved, eliminate it as a weekly pull-out and have it replace the Friday Today section, much like we've done with Home.
- Reorganize the paper so that A is all local news, B is all wire news.
- Explore partnerships with the Journal of Business and KHQ. Send visitors from our Web site to KHQ videos for ambulance-chasing stories. Preserve our video efforts for more comprehensive story-telling. Discontinue our business section and use content from JoB or have an arrangement to package The S-R with the JoB once a week.
- Organize the newsroom into teams of people who need to more closely communicate. Teams might contain reporters, editors, photographers, designers and other staff.

The Spokesman-Review Proposed reorganization



***The Spokesman-Review
Proposed reorganization
for local news**



**The Spokesman-Review
Proposed reorganization:
additional staffing**

