

The New York Times: Designing Powerful Narratives in the Age of Post-Truth

The New York Times might just be the greatest newspaper in the world; without a doubt, it is one of the most prestigious and respected. Despite its nickname, the "Old Gray Lady" is neither old nor gray but quite the contrary: in her entire history, she has never been in better condition than at this very moment. Today, the New York Times is a veritable factory of innovation where new ways of telling stories are continually developed and tested. The paper has become a source of pure journalistic design for the digital era.

The numbers that describe the Times are astonishing: 1,350 reporters on staff, 30 international bureaus, and 75 permanent overseas correspondents. In 2016 the paper published articles filed from 150 countries. It has been awarded 198 Pulitzer Prizes, surpassing any other publication. Its worldwide online audience is close to 200 million unique users per month. The combined total of print and digital subscriptions is more than three million. Never before have so many people read one newspaper. But even on this scale, complacency is not a part of its DNA. If there is one traditional legacy media company that has decided to undergo a digital transformation no matter what it takes, it is the New York Times.

1. The historic front page of July 21, 1969. To this day, the headline remains the largest the Times has ever printed.
2. The 2012 front page announcing Barack Obama's re-election as president of the United States. Only on rare occasions does the Times print a headline that takes up the entire width of the page and contains two levels of text.
3. To a great extent, innovation in the New York Times has come via its graphics department, and newspapers around the world pay close attention to the visual narratives the Times has pioneered. In this example, a strikingly simple yet powerful visual shows changes in voting behavior in 2010.

The reinvention of the paper has, in essence, occurred over the course of the current decade and was guided by three key documents—the products of three separate and wide-ranging internal analyses. Furthermore, these three reports reflect the commitment of the Times to both journalistic excellence and unsparring self-critique. These documents have become frames of reference for all of the changes put in place as well as those yet to be made, given that the process of reinvention that the Times has embarked upon is perpetual.

The first and most important of the three documents is the "Innovation Report," published in March 2014. It was created across six months by a group of 10 people led by A. G. Sulzberger, who became publisher in January 2018, the fifth generation of the owning family to lead the paper. The report had an immediate internal impact that eventually extended far beyond the Times itself. At the time of the report, the audience for the paper's digital platforms was decreasing. The evaluation revealed that while the New York Times did indeed create journalism of the highest quality, it was not succeeding, unlike some of its competitors, in delivering this content to its audience. The report concluded that in order to have a successful future in the news industry, the paper had to not only produce the best reporting, but also find ways to adequately distribute this content through the multiple channels offered by technology. In its 100 pages, the "Innovation Report" laid the basis for an internal revolution that eventually erased many previously held notions, to such an extent that today the Times is a "digital first" organization.

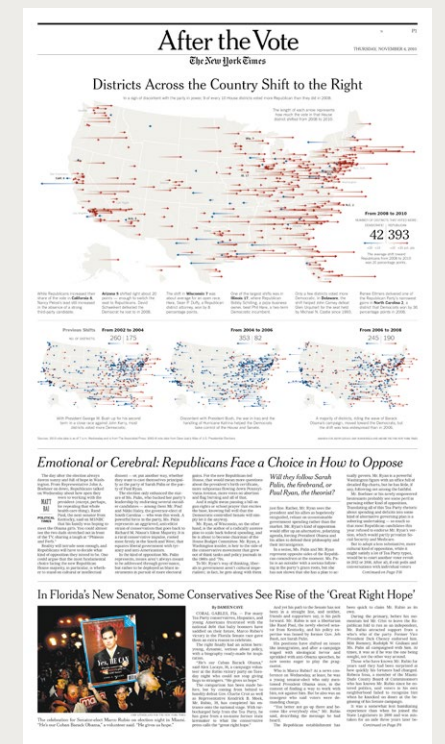
The second document, "Our Path Forward," was published in October 2015. Dean Baquet, the executive editor of the Times, and other leading editors at the paper authored this concise, 11-page report. The document emphasized the crucial importance of mobile devices and laid down the challenge

Basic Facts

Headquarters: New York City, USA
Type: National daily
Days of circulation: Monday to Sunday
Format: Broadsheet
Year of foundation: 1851
Founded by: Henry Raymond Jarvis and George Jones
Owners: The New York Times Company



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for the coming years: to bring the same experience to these new platforms that the paper had been delivering for decades in its print edition. It also insisted that a commercial strategy based on paid subscriptions was the only possible path forward. Additionally, it articulated the goal of converting the paper into not only a vehicle for great, relevant reporting, but a guide for the readers in their daily lives. "Our Path Forward" is, to a certain extent, the point of departure that brought about the creation of such successful digital projects as the Cooking, Watching, and Well sections, which are respectively dedicated to cuisine, movies and television, and personal well-being.

The third and final document was titled "Journalism That Stands Apart." Published in January 2017, its principal conclusion was that the pace of innovation had to be speeded up if the paper was to reach its goal of generating 800 million dollars in income from digital sources by the year 2020. The report dictated essential change to the type of journalism the paper produces, and to both the composition of the reporting staff and the way that work is done at the Times. It placed specific emphasis on visual journalism as a vehicle for change. "The report needs to become more visual. We have defined multimedia storytelling for the news

industry and established ourselves as the clear leader. Yet despite our excellence, not enough of our report uses digital storytelling tools that allow for richer and more engaging journalism. Too much of our daily report remains dominated by long strings of text. Creating a more visual daily report is an enormous opportunity."

Because the report indicated that only 12 percent of the stories appearing in the Times in 2016 included some type of visual element, the paper established the goal of increasing this to 50 percent in a short period of time. The report stated that "to solve the problem, we need to expand the number of visual experts who work at the Times and also expand the number who are in leadership roles." Steve Duenes, Graphics Director and now also Assistant Managing Editor at the Times, explained: "It means we want visuals to deliver more of our journalism because we think it will make our report better. It also means that we want to serve our readers, and there are times when visual journalism can best meet their needs. Visual journalism is a pretty broad basket that includes everything from simple, explanatory stories to video, data visualization, and photography. Becoming more visual will mean some newsroom changes, which are already happening. Desks like Culture and International have promoted editors who



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