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**Michael Giltz**

Freelance writer and raconteur

Posted March 28, 2008 | 04:24 PM (EST)

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# New York Times: Cutting Staff But Making Movies



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Recently, I was mildly taken aback by *New York Times* tech reporter David Pogue creating a **music video for the new iPhone**. Always known for his humorous and reader-friendly approach to tech, Pogue was simply taking the next logical step. Ask someone to create videos for your website and this is what they'll do. But it seemed to cross a line to me, somehow. Not the end of the world, of course, but why exactly is the *New York Times* spending precious resources (time and money and talent) on entertainment, on shorts practically designed to get lots of hits on

YouTube? It wasn't the clever music video itself that bothered me so much as where I saw it heading.

**And this is where it's arrived:** the *New York Times* is hosting a series of 12 short films featuring young actors improvising to scenarios by director Brody Baker. It was all done at Sundance, apparently, and every few days the *New York Times* features a new short in which actors like Josh Lucas, Jason Ritter and Saffron Burrows emote in and around hotel rooms.

I don't care how good or bad the shorts are -- they could be Oscar worthy gems or an indulgent waste of time. I don't care if the *New York Times* didn't actually "spend" any money on the filming and casting. I don't care if this is only marginally different from getting young actors to pose in clothes for a fashion spread. (Besides, it still feels like getting in bed with actors you're supposed to be reporting on objectively.)

All I care about is that this is NOT how the *New York Times* should be spending its finite time and energy. The *New York Times* should not be making music videos. The *New York Times* should not be making short films. The *New York Times* should not be wasting valuable real estate on its website promoting them. The *New York Times* should not be hiring reporters/talent who look good on camera and are known for funny videos so they can branch out into YouTube. But you know

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they will be soon.

I'm pretty sure the *New York Times* has its hands full covering the news. And writing **terrific, in-depth articles like this**, articles that few news outlets can afford to spend the time and energy reporting. Sure, the story of a 22 year old guy buying piles of aging, decaying ammunition from Eastern Europe and flipping it to sell to Afghani fighters is so blackly humorous that it's probably already been optioned for the movies. I just don't want to see the film be funded by the *Times* and debut on their website.

So are these shorts a complete waste because the *New York Times* should focus on its core mission? Or am I just an old fuddy duddy?

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I think there just branching out to maintain those staff cuts lower as much as they can but again it shows that everything to a point is going to be online....pretty sure there still be paper and Theatres but much of our time will be spend on boxes and squares.

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**dkblanar** [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of dkblanar](#) [permalink](#)

I'm curious: what do you believe NYT's core mission is? Entertaining? Informing? Being profitable?

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An ice bridge linking a shelf of ice the size of

Fuddy Duddy or not, you represent a declining readership; print media's inexorable ebb will continue, unabated, until it recognises that the values to which you allude above -- namely, noble sums of time, energy and costs associated with producing in-depth Journalism -- are not necessarily the same values young people are interested in protecting.

A 2007 Pew Research poll found as many adults, who regularly got their news from The Daily Show, demonstrated a "high knowledge" of current events as those who did so from print news outlets (54%). The NYT is the gatekeeper no more, reflected in a declining subscriber base and disappearing offline advertising revenue. So who is the NYT writing for? And is this the same audience it needs to survive?

You evidently value NTY's investigative, thorough approach; that's fine. But Alexa.com reports Digg.com has a greater reach than NewYorkTimes.com, suggesting the market does not agree with you. It marks the rise of the Citizen Journalist, a trend pros like Jeff Jarvis celebrate.

For better or worse, the NYT is not a philosophical experiment; I'm not an employee of the Times, but if I were, I would be shouting to all who would listen: Our domain is the world, online and off; let our values of Truth and Public Service imbue our work in whatever form it may take, from op-eds to music videos to islands on virtual worlds.

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NicoleAnonymous See Profile I'm a Fan of NicoleAnonymous permalink

Now I understand why our country is so messed up. Jon Stewart is a comedien, not an investigative reporter.

Maybe the problem is Americans are so lazy that they want their news told to them by comedians while they watch TV instead of actually reading books or buying a newspaper and actually reading it.

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InofTouch See Profile I'm a Fan of InofTouch permalink

Daily Show, just like wikipedia shouldn't be your main source but that how people are. stuck because for some reason.

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editrix66 See Profile I'm a Fan of editrix66 permalink

I love the Daily Show and watch it regularly, but I would never think it a substitute for in-depth investigative journalism, and I doubt Jon Stewart would, either. Identification of events and newsmakers in a poll certainly cannot discern the level of depth of knowledge of those events. Many on this site have bemoaned the lack of depth and horrible quality of television journalism, and I can certainly understand the fear that newspaper journalism will follow suit.

Favorite Flag as abusive Posted 04:24 PM on 03/29/2008

Michael Giltz See Profile I'm a Fan of Michael Giltz permalink

I agree with editrx66 -- and Jon Stewart. Those polls or surveys are poorly worded or misguided. You don't really enjoy The Daily Show UNLESS you're already informed about the day's issues from other sources, you know, tired old media.

And dkblannar, I believe the core mission of the NYT is to be profitable. The best way for them to be profitable and build on their brand is to do what they do well: informed, intelligent, reported news articles. What they cannot and never will do well is compete with hundreds of thousands of college kids to create wacky videos that get lots of hits on YouTube. Diversifying into music videos and film shorts with young actors improvising their hearts out degrades the brand name value of the NYTimes and diverts precious resources from what they CAN do well to areas they will NEVER do well. The NYTimes website is one of the most successful in the world and gets zillions of links because of the original news articles and opinions and reviews. Dumbing down the site and losing track of its core identity - timely, accurate, balanced news coverage of breaking events and in-depth features -- will endanger the very profitability they're striving for. Making themselves look like Yahoo or YouTube or some comedy website is a tempting, but very stupid path for them to make.

Jamaica to two islands in Antarctica has

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Thorn See Profile I'm a Fan of Thorn permalink

The Times is a private company. Your tax dollars aren't involved. Why do you apparently think you have a vote?

Favorite Flag as abusive Posted 04:34 PM on 03/28/2008

Michael Giltz See Profile I'm a Fan of Michael Giltz permalink

Who said anything about tax dollars? The NYTimes is a venerable institution that I and many others respect and read every day (except Saturdays). The trends launched by the NYTimes invariably influence papers and media outlets around the country. If I think the Times is doing a great job in an area (like that terrific article on arms dealers that I linked to), I applaud it. If I think it's making a mistake (like diverting energy to time-wasters like music videos and film shorts that are far, far afield of what it does best), I jeer it. I don't own stock in NBC but I have an opinion on the sitcoms and dramas it airs. What the NYTimes does is far more important. And as newspapers everywhere struggle to find their footing amidst declining readership and ads, they're going to make some mistakes. This is one of the them. If you go to the NYTimes website to see film shorts and YouTube exercises in entertainment, by all means email them and let them know or publish your own commentary. As one of the most important media outlets in the world, it would be bizarre if people DIDN'T comment on something radically new by the Times. They haven't done it yet, but it would be dumb of them to try developing webisodes of sitcoms that could be spun off to the major networks or a cable channel. Etc.

Favorite Flag as abusive Posted 12:02 AM on 03/29/2008

larry278 See Profile I'm a Fan of larry278 permalink

The New York Times , "... one of the most important media outlets in the world.", not. Mike, you are one of the few users of HP who would comment that the NYT is an important element of the MSM mix any more. FYI The NYT is no longer America's sole newspaper of record. The NYT can't even be considered to be a newspaper of record among America's newspapers of record. The NYT suffers from poor writing & editing. One wonders why SLATE includes the NYT in "Today's Papers". TP is a daily survey of the more important news, etc America's newspapers of record cover. Some consider TP as the de facto list of America's newspapers. Others would object to including the dying, lack luster NYT or USA TODAY, aka McPaper, a dumbed down paper with national distribution, short stories which use a limited vocabulary or simple, short words, a number of color photos & simple graphs & other media short comings in a de facto, informal roster of America's newspapers. The NYT continues to survive on the basis of the NYT's long past reputation. Rupert Murdoch, who now controls the Wall St JI, has said that he wants to drive the NYT out of business. His Rupertship & his editors are turning the WSJ, once the USA's sole financial newspaper of record, into a general interest paper. Some feel that the UK's, FINANCIAL TIMES's American ed, has become by default America's financial newspaper of record.

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