

## **ICT And The Future Of Journalism Profession ( I )**

By Mawutodzi K. Abissath

A renowned Ghanaian Blogger by the name Emmanuel K. Bensah,II (a.k.a. Emma), recently made an analogy that: "As behind every married couple there is a partner, so, too, behind every Blog there is a Blogger!" This analogy can be said to be common place. But the most sarcastic and humorous fashion by which Emma went about it is what is pushing me to make a mountain out of an ant hill in this piece. In other words, there can be no Blog without a Blogger. And if you are a journalist who is not yet too familiar with the term Blog or Blogger, do not go and commit suicide at all.

The purpose of this article is to share with you some of the latest terminologies ICT has introduced into our time honoured profession or occupation or vocation or calling or trade; (whichever is applicable). As journalists, we should never pretend that we know everything under the sun. Rather, we must be open-minded and prepared to learn new things every day as we breathe and eat every day. Otherwise, ICT will render us outdated and outmoded, if not antiquated and archaic! This is an unsolicited advice from me to you.

From Wednesday, October 10, to Thursday, October 11, 2007, the Ghana Journalists Association (GJA), the Penplusbyte International Institute of ICT Journalism, the Ghana Information and Knowledge Sharing (GINKS) and the Ghana ICT Journalists Association (GHAJICT), organised a two-day WEB 2.0 Workshop for Editors, Senior Journalists, and media Educators. This eye opener capacity building programme was sponsored by the French Embassy in Accra. The theme for the event was: "Improving the Quality of Journalism using Web 2.0." If you are a journalist reading this article, tell me honestly if you know what WEB 2.0 is. As for me I confess that that I have never heard of that until Wednesday, October 10, 2007 at the Ghana International Press Centre at the GJA Headquarters in Accra, where the workshop was held.

Togbe Kwami Ahiabenu II, President of Penplusbyte and Facilitator of the above- stated workshop was the person from whom I heard the term WEB 2.0 for the first time in my life. Before setting the ball rolling that morning, Kwami posed this question to the class: "Who knows what WEB 2.0 is? And the entire room turned into a grave yard. We were all looking into his face like some innocent children collected from some rural community from some unknown planet. But this was a class that was made up of veteran journalists and media educators.

In fact some of the participants were journalists of repute in Ghana.

One particular one from one of the leading media houses in Accra was a dignified and noble man in the true sense of the word. Nature has been very kind to him. He possesses such a huge baobab-like stature with a luminous boar-head to march. In fact his physical structure classifies him more a super-heavy-weight boxing champion than a journalist. For those who know me personally, I can easily go into this man four times. And I suspect he might have been practicing journalism before my mother became a teenager. I could not plug up the courage to ask him why he did not become a General in the Ghana Army. He is one of the outstanding newspaper page planners or design and layout specialists in West Africa. He is a veteran in his own his class and I admire him a great deal. Remember this African proverb that: "If your friend is more handsome than you, it is better to praise him rather than to try to malign or envy him." All right?

There was another participant who is a PhD holder and teaches law at one of the private journalism training schools in Accra. Another grey-haired participant and lecturer at one of the latest modern media training institutions in Accra was among us. He told me he left School of Communication Studies, University of Ghana, Legon as far back as 1974 and has practiced the profession both at home and abroad for many, many years. A very knowledgeable but humble and unassuming. I enjoyed his companionship at the workshop. When it came to Blogging, I, too, became a lecturer to most of them anyway. I find it enjoyable to share the little I have with others. Now we are in information age and if you hoard information you will be known as an information silo.

One lady participant, too, who works with the mother of all electronic media houses in Ghana, whispered into my ears that she left the Ghana Institute of Journalism about ten years before I found my way there some 20 years ago. So you can imagine how long this veteran female journalist and gender fighter has been operating in our domain. And I salute her for what she stands for. There were also some relatively young but talented and well-read journalists among the participants. The point I am trying to hammer home here is that the calibre of participants who attended this particular workshop in terms of education, experience and professionalism, was beyond compare. And yet, there is something that all of us did not know hitherto. That something is what ICT has succeeded in transforming journalism into.

The question now is: "What is it that ICT has brought into journalism which has turned veterans into kindergarten boys and girls at my first day in school?" I will answer my own question by simply saying: It is TECHNOLOGY. It is presumed that every journalist in Ghana today whether veteran or student knows that ICT stands for Information and

Communication Technology. From time immemorial journalists have been communicating information through various channels including traditional means such as word of mouth, talking drums and gongong. Then through print and electronic media namely, newspapers or magazines etc, radio and television. You can add telephone, telex, fax machine and others, if you like.

Then, there came into existence an ICT. With the advent of ICT boom, everything mankind has been doing from birth to death has changed. But journalism seems to be the profession that has been most drastically affected by ICT. The result is what is now known as E-journalism or Online-journalism or Cyber-journalism or Web-journalism. And the basic ICT tools that journalists need to perform this online-journalism business effectively include computers, the Internet and to a certain scope the World Wide Web (www) itself which gave birth to the Internet in the first place by making it possible for computers to talk other computers through connectivity and network.

Hardly did journalists go to bed to have a siesta when ICT tools have not only metamorphosed into something else but have actually revolutionised and multiplied in an thousand fold. Some of the new ICT tools which were introduced to Editors, senior journalists and educators at the just-ended WEB 2.0 worship include the Web 2.0 itself, Podcasting, Blogging and Wikis.

WEB 2.0 we were told came into being in 2004 and is the evolution of the Internet over the years. For instance, when Internet boom emerged in the 90s, even though World Wide Web itself has been in existence since the 60s, some of the tools of WEB 2.0 of today were not there in the 90s. Therefore, the Internet of the 90s can now be referred to as WEB 1.0. In simple terms, some of the tools that distinguish WEB 2.0 from WEB 1.0 include Podcasting, Blogging and Wikis stated above. If we break it down the concept further, other ICT tools that Podcasting and Blogging also could employ to achieve their functions include Mobile Blogging, SMS Blogging, GSM/CDMA (sub mobile internet), Skype, Mobile phone, Satellite phone (Thuraya), MMS (picture transfer/sharing), Bluetooth, Infra-red and so on. Other latest ICT tool which must be mentioned in this regard is Vedioblogging.

To be frank with the reader, these are some of the theoretical aspects of the two-day workshop which we were exposed to. Unfortunately for us, however, when it came to the practical aspects of the course which we need to put the teaching into practical application in our work, internet connectivity failed us the Press Centre. The organizers had to quickly arrange for us to go to one of computer laboratories at the near-by Kofi Annan ICT Centre of Advanced Technology, opposite the State House.

There, too, we encountered some challenges as far as the Internet speed was concerned. So I will not pretend to say that I can do all that I am writing about in this feature as far as Podcasting and Vedio blogging are concerned. As for Blogging proper, I had had some knowledge in it already so I can modestly hit my chest that if you call on me day or night I can take you through the rudiments of Blog creating. And you can do it in no time at all.

As stated in the opening paragraph of this write-up, when Emma was taking us through the Blogging lesson, he made the subject matter so interesting with his famous analogy that the learning became fun for us all. Before he started, he asked the class that all those who were married should show by hand. Virtually everybody in the class raised up their hands. Initially, nobody knew what he was driving at some of us even raised up both hands. Then he proclaimed (and I am paraphrasing him here): As behind every married person there is a partner - a wife or a husband, so, too, behind every Blog there is a Blogger!

Suddenly the entire computer lab burst into spontaneous and prolonged laughter. He himself could not help it but to laugh infectiously. Then someone asked him whether he himself was married and he said capital NO. So it turned out that all the students in the class were married expect the lecturer rather. When he was asked why he was not yet married, he responded: "I am studying you people and I want to learn from you first." His answer to the question made the class to laugh even the more. Emma could be in his 30s or so and he is a man of impeccable and fantastic sense of humour.

On a more serious note, we learned that if journalists could master the use of some of these latest tools of ICT, they would help them to enhance their work especially in the newsroom. For example, Journalists can create Blogs for research work, or for photographs, or for features. If you are a reporter and you can create a Blog and post all your newstories or your feature articles on it, apart from publishing such a Blog on the Internet and link it to other websites for the world to read, you can use it as a reference book or diary for your journalistic activities. Editors can use Blogs to monitor and assess the work of their reporters in such a way that at the end of every year, they would know which reporter deserves promotion or even salary increments.

A Blog is a kind of website anybody can develop or create without having to be an ICT "techy". When you are able to create your own Blog and post information or photographs or both text and graphics on it and can update it constantly, then can call yourself a Blogger. There are several platforms for Blogging. But the one we were introduced to at the

workshop is [BLOGGER.COM](https://www.blogger.com).