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At first glance, the Ball State Daily News and NewsLink Indiana come across as similar media organizations, both in purpose – reporting the news – and in outward appearance – seemingly professional work environments.

However, after the initial appreciation for the availability of this kind of professionalism at Ball State fades away, the masquerade of the organizations shows through. This is especially true for the Daily News, which pales in comparison to its neighbor in the Ball Communication Building.

The inherent problems in both of the operations, albeit few at NewsLink, seem to stem from a number of causes, foremost of which is the format of news output demanded by each operation. By nature, broadcast television is required to cover news over a large geographic area but the depth of the stories is limited by time constraints. This leads to the varied selection of offbeat features from around central Indiana and a focus on retelling and relaying the main information, rather than an emphasis on helping the viewer understand the story completely. Longer explanations are best suited to the print format.

For the most part, all of the news items that turned into stories at NewsLink were originally from other news outlets, while the Daily News relied on investigative reporters and frequent sources to discover events. The direction that the stories followed after reporters gathered information was somewhat contradictory to each piece's origin: The originality of story ideas at the Daily News was stifled, while most of NewsLink's pieces were uniquely interpreted, despite originating from other news sources.

Due to the hierarchy of command at the Daily News, stories were passed along between at least two additional people for clearance (editing) before they were further "interpreted" by page designers and photographers.

This procedure differs greatly from NewsLink's two-man teams. After a reporter and videographer covered a story, they returned to begin editing. Some reporters even stayed to assist conceptually during editing, and without any significant oversight, the pair crafted their entire story, from raw product and voiceovers, to the finished project. After a quick check with the producer for time and content, the story was ready for broadcast. While it could be argued that this approach could damage credibility due to the lack of informational safeguards, the trust the producer appeared to have in his teams outweighed any concern.

It is this control, or lack thereof, from start to finish, that is the cause of the palpable difference between the quality of the two outlets' emotional atmosphere.

At the Daily News, constant arguing and bickering about the finished product and the steps taken to get there greatly hinders the unity of the publication. Students seem to be working only for themselves – to get a portfolio clip – be it an article, editing corrections, a published photo, or a unique design – rather than being genuinely concerned about what needs to be done to tell the story most effectively. The disagreement and selfishness found everywhere add to the pressure of the ever-looming deadline to make the newsroom one of the most stressful places on campus for students.

NewsLink staff members, on the other hand, were far ahead of deadline and were smiling and laughing all the way to the end. The group of students seemed like they were a team working toward a common goal: a professional news program. Some of the relaxation surely comes from being able to instantly review finished stories exactly as they will be seen, unlike the need of the Daily News to wait until morning for printed copies. This helps to ensure that all of the people involved with a story are happy with the output, rather than having to complain about something after it is too late.

Media convergence is an area where both productions fail miserably. The Daily News occasionally puts interactive graphics online, but leaves a great amount to be desired from each story. Articles on the website are nothing more

than shortened print versions and usually provide very little additional information. If the newspaper and Ball Bearings would cooperate more to provide in-depth stories, the extras could be accessed online and would help entice print readers to check out the website.

There is no reason that NewsLink should not have all of their video segments online. Currently only a transcript of the broadcast is available. This would help the community to have other chances to see the broadcast, because its daily air time is very brief. Telecommunications students helping with the production do have the benefit of frequent staff interaction from Sy Jenkins and Tim Underhill who seemed very willing to help and gave students useful tips about the industry and convergence.

The lack of constant faculty attention means that the Daily News is an independent, student-run production, but also means that it does not function well during a crisis. Having help who is not actively involved in generating the content would ensure that problems could be taken care of without taking someone away from working on the paper. Both Jenkins and Underhill did this very thing when there was a computer rendering problem at NewsLink. There is occasional staff interaction at the Daily News, but the help is often spread too thinly amongst the large staff of the paper.

Merging the two operations would be a potential solution to many of the problems of both and allow them to share resources; however, the differences between the attitudes of both staffs may be incompatible. It is doubtful that NewsLink members would like giving up the freedom they enjoy each day, while the Daily News staff would have a very hard time trying to loosen their rigid system of textbook professionalism. Joining the two would create a potential human resources disaster. Perhaps it would be best if they stayed separate, because they seem to each be filling their own niche – portfolio pieces for the newspaper, and news reporting for the broadcast – quite well.

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