

Online 'paper' coming to Boulder?

Former Camera biz editor pursues competing venture

Shifting trends in local media may be shaking things up for the Boulder Daily Camera, courtesy of a former Camera editor.

Robert Wells earlier this year launched The Boulder Reporter, an online-only "project" to determine whether Boulder needs and can support an online-only community publication. (The Boulder Reporter is not to be confused with the Boulder Report, a blog written by former Boulder County Business Report co-publisher Jerry W. Lewis.)

Wells comes to the venture with an impressive résumé: He was a co-founder of Where to Live in Boulder County and what became known as Boulder Magazine. He also was a business reporter for the Detroit Free-Press and the Rocky Mountain News, and served as business editor at the Camera from 1988 to 1990.

Since then, he's worked in a variety of local media and marketing roles and currently is managing director for Lennox Communications, a public-relations firm in Boulder.

His April 7 article, posted on www.boulderreporter.com, asked the question, "Does Boulder need an online 'newspaper'?"

"An opportunity may be emerging for someone to create a platform for pithy, valuable reporting and insight-

ful commentary about life in Boulder, Colorado," Wells wrote.

Wells outlined three preconditions for such a venture to succeed:

- "Demise or further shrinkage" of the Daily Camera. "Insiders suggest that with MediaNews's heavy debt load, and with all the publications probably losing money, business as usual can't go on forever," Wells wrote.



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- His "ability to assemble a strong core of reporters, videographers, bloggers and editors to make the content happen."

Wells told me in a telephone conversation this week that he developed The Boulder Reporter concept during the height of newspaper closures. "I hatched the idea when newspapers were failing left and right," he said, "and at that time, I thought the Camera would be the next to go."

Now, he's not so sure. "The Camera is a viable entity," he said. "You get up in the morning, and the Camera does give a decent snapshot of yesterday's Boulder County news."

Does that mean there wouldn't be

a place for a more-developed Boulder Reporter? Wells said he's still not sure, but that a site that was "a little more thoughtful, analytical and gossipy" might work.

Thus far, The Boulder Reporter includes only content written by Wells, but he said he's had conversations with several current and former media professionals and business leaders about contributing.

He added that the current BoulderReporter.com Web site would have to be much more fully developed to succeed, with heavy emphasis on video, social media and interactivity. He added that securing support from nonprofits, foundations and "community-minded individuals" would be essential, as would development of a loyal base of advertisers.

Wells' effort will be fun to watch, and is similar to efforts under way in Denver by two groups, InDenverTimes.com and RockyMountainIndependent.com. Neither are nonprofits, but both include former Rocky Mountain News staffers attempting to provide online-only alternatives to The Denver Post.

Whether those ventures succeed, and whether the Camera stumbles enough to leave room for The Boulder Reporter remains to be seen. What's clear is that there are a lot of people out there like Wells, ready to shake things up.

Christopher Wood can be reached at 303-440-4950 or via e-mail at cwood@bcb.com.