

ACES 2011 presidential speech, national conference

“Now is a sorry time, a strange and scary time, to be an editor — a terrible time to be an editor, right?”

Well, no.

Whatever happens to newspapers, in my view, it's a great time to be an editor. It may be the best time in history if you're a good editor — if you're intelligent and thoughtful and creative and adaptable.”

What might surprise you about those words is that they weren't written by me this week or this year. They were written 15 years ago by ACES board member and retired NYT copy editor Bill Connolly at the first meeting of copy editors at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill ... when ACES was just a glimmer of an idea.

Fifteen years have passed and a lot has changed, but those words still ring true today.

Back then, the Internet was just starting and editors were unsure what the digital age would bring.

Surely they never imagined iPhones, iPads, Kindles and tablets. Much as we may not be able to imagine what the landscape of editing may look like in another 15 years. Or if that ACES president will scoff at my words today or look back at them and find inspiration -- as I do Bill's.

What we can do is embrace these exciting times – if, as Bills says, we are intelligent, thoughtful, creative and adaptable.

And we hope this ACES conference will help and inspire you to be that editor.

That it nourishes your roots in quality editing.

That it gives you the skills to excel at changing technologies.

That it helps you forge new relationships with colleagues who share your love of language.

That it instills you with hope and confidence.

That it helps you find your voice to scream your importance and relevance.

To that end, this week, we are releasing the results of a major research project by ACES and Fred Vultee of Wayne State University that measures errors online and reader retention. This research will put hard data in your hands to show your bosses that your work equals dollars for your company.

Our schedule is filled with more multimedia technology sessions than ever before without giving short shrift to the basics.

We are celebrating the best and most inspirational in our industry by giving out scholarships, announcing headline contest winners and awarding the Glamann and Robinson prizes.

And we are bringing together some of the best minds in our industry to discuss our future and answer your questions during the closing session.

As Bill pointed out 15 years ago, even if media fails to adapt as we hope, that doesn't mean we as editors also will fail to adapt.

I'll close by quoting Mr. Connolly again: "It will be a great time for editors because in our society, for whatever reason, engineers have always been more prolific than poets. Our collective ability to deliver information far outstrips our ability to create it and package it, to make it understandable and useful and entertaining ... to do, in other words, what editors do.

... The Internet is a flood — a deluge — of ill-formed opinion and undigested data. What it needs is not more data but more digestion — more sense, more judgment and intelligence. What the Internet needs is competent, thinking editors."

And not only do we want to help you be those competent/thoughtful editors, we want to help you be editors who stare the future in the face and dare history to be written without them.

Thank you and enjoy the conference.