INFORMATION TRUST EXCHANGE
BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT THE
PHASE 1 – LAUNCH FEASIBILITY REVIEW

July 1, 2014 – Sept. 30, 2014

Since U.S. newspapers began in the mid-1990s to market news on the World Wide Web, they have searched for new revenues to support the practice, initially focusing on advertising. By 2012 many papers began seeking online subscription revenues as well.

Efforts at collaboration have been spotty. But a breakthrough occurred on March 18, 2014 when *The Washington Post* announced it would begin providing selected online news products as a free premium for subscribers to selected regional newspapers. The move marked experimentation by a key U.S. publisher with the concept of a shared-user network.

> *"This program is a way for us to work with newspapers and other print and digital partners around the country to both add value to their subscriptions and expose* The Post *to a wider audience than ever before,"* Stephen Hills, president of The Post*, said in a statement.*

Has *The Post*'s experiment opened the way for consideration of a broader news- and information-industry collaboration? To find out the Donald W. Reynolds Journalism Institute is seeking answers to three questions:

- Could a non-profit collaboration to share technology, users and content help set standards for convenient web information sale?

- Could it provide the public with more trustworthy information choices, and better privacy control?

- Is organizing such an effort feasible?

TEN QUESTIONS – ANSWERED

1.Who is conducting this review and why?

Bill Densmore is conducting discussions and doing research for the Reynolds Journalism Institute (RJI) at the University of Missouri School of Journalism. The point is to see if forming a non-profit consortium could help create a more efficient marketplace for finding and selling news and other digital information valuable to civic life – and add another option for sustaining journalism.

2.   What do you mean by a 'more efficient marketplace'?

The Internet has unleashed an exciting and unprecedented torrent of news and information from all kinds of sources. Where once the public relied upon a few publishers or broadcasters to mind the gates to information, now the public can range freely. The marketplace is open; it is also confusing. There is no simple mechanism for a public user to have a single account for multiple information purchases, or a single place to manage their identity and privacy. Publishers cannot easily be compensated when they share stories among their users and services. It is like a power grid running on different cycles, railroads on competing gauges of track, a phone system with no way to bill minutes -- or physical stores with varying and independent credit cards that don't interoperate.

3.   What difference does it make?

Because users can now go anywhere for information, they also would like to be able to assemble personalized, custom packages of that news and information, much as they might assemble their groceries in a shopping card. On the web, there is no single store that carries small bits of information – articles – for purchase. Digital goods are spread asunder, and there is no common "checkout" method to pay for them if you want a personalized bundle. As a result, the only bundles available from aggregators are either free or have limited content choices.

4.   What does this feasibility work entail?

We're reviewing the history and current state of news-industry collaboration regarding digital users, payments, advertising and content. We're interviewing and consulting individuals and organizations to assess the timeliness and feasibility of creating a non-profit, public-benefit, member association. Should develop protocols, write business rules, foster technology or govern a shared user network for trust, identity, privacy and information payments?

5.   What if your outreach suggests industry and public interest in the idea?

Then we will start to identify legal, technical, management and philanthropic advisors with potential experience appropriate to creating an Information Trust Exchange. We'll consider how it could be governed, and connect with potential for-profit operating partners. We'll assemble a team to develop a mission, rationale and objectives for such an initiative consistent with the level and nature of support identified.

6.   Ideas like this always raise questions about competition, monopoly and antitrust. Have you thought about that?

Certainly we have at a conceptual level and in discussions with antitrust experts. Legal collaboration is possible around technology standards. Antitrust jurisprudence and precedents provide ample guidance for avoiding any collaboration that would permit price-fixing or other types of collusion injurious to the public.

7.   What will be the outcome of this inquiry?

RJI will evaluate the research, consult advisors, and determine if it makes sense to take the next step of helping lead formation of an Information Trust Association.

8.   How can I stay informed about this effort?

Email densmorew@rjionline.org with a request to be added to our contact list to receive periodic updates and invitations, or to offer your input to our research. You can reach Densmore at 617-448-6600.   Also watch for updates at http://www.informationvalet.org or http://www.infotrust.org