

What will newspapers look like in 20 years?

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/magazine/4244908.stm

WHO, WHAT, WHY?
The Magazine answers...

The re-sizing of the Guardian into a so-called Berliner is the latest radical step by newspapers trying to arrest declining sales. So what will papers look like in 20 years, if they're still around?



Soon a thing of the past?

Not even the wisest sage could predict with confidence what form newspapers will adopt - but there are certain pointers which seem to be sensible.

Firstly the fact of newspapers' existence at all. Their death has long been predicted. Even just 10 years ago, doom-mongers said websites and rolling television news would mean the end of cumbersome, outdated and smudgy print.

Just as the bowler hats had disappeared from the City, so the newspapers tucked under arms would follow into oblivion, they said.

Since that prophecy, the threat has been compounded by blogs, search engines, mobile phones, PDAs and even electronic paper.

Although newspapers have so far defied the gloomy predictions, they are taking radical steps to respond to the competition. The Guardian is the third daily broadsheet to adopt a more compact size - and others may well follow.

WHO, WHAT, WHY?
A new feature to the BBC News Magazine - aiming to answer some of the questions behind the headlines

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Despite these changes, though, the format has not changed hugely since the first English language private newspaper, the Corante, was published in 1621 in London.

Today, global newspaper sales are up, by 2.1% in 2004, but not in the UK, down 4.4% on 2003.

This is hardly surprising, given the competition. The appetite for news websites or search engines which gather news stories has rocketed. More and more people are accessing news on other platforms like mobile phones, while blogs offer a more personalised and off-beat take on news events.

And other technical innovations - such as electronic paper which can display text and be re-written - are in the pipeline.

A glimpse of what could be possible came in the film *Minority Report*, in a scene where a man reads what looks like a newspaper, but the page changes electronically as he is reading it.

“The thing is paper is terribly convenient: how many newspaper buyers read them on the loo?”

Vince Graff
Media commentator

British newspapers won't die out, says media commentator Vince Graff, because they are so portable, easy to use and cheap.

Their content has changed, in response to the competition of 24-hour news outlets, to reflect more entertainment, lifestyle and analysis, he says. But the paper format will survive.

RIP broadsheets

"I think even in 50 years' time there will be newspapers on paper, though they may be a niche product then, perhaps in the same way vinyl records are now," he says.

"The thing is paper is terribly convenient: how many newspaper-buyers read them on the loo?"

"But I think it is looking increasingly unlikely that there will be anything in broadsheet shape. That is already looking very old fashioned."

More people will use e-papers, says Caroline Bassett, senior lecturer at the department of media and film at Sussex University.

“You could collect your Guardian from your portable device”

"You could imagine newspapers existing as data which can be sent to many kinds of electronic screens.

Caroline Bassett
Media studies lecturer

"So you could collect your paper from your portable device such as mobile phone or laptop. At the other end of the market there could be newspapers delivered to public screens in stations, for example."

But the newspaper as we know it today will survive, says Ms Bassett, because it is favoured by many readers who find it easier to scan and more pleasant to hold.

Just as radio has survived television and theatre has defied film, the traditional newspaper - and in a form we would recognise - could endure.