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# A Time to Read

The written word has been at the heart of capturing and disseminating human knowledge. Funny enough, that word “disseminating” is aptly found in the purpose statement of the Midwest.

The statement is a long, wordy sentence that captures the intent of our founding members to band together as an Association. It is preserved in Article 1 of the Bylaws and each time I read through it, I take away another meaning behind each carefully depicted phrase and sentence. That is what the written word allows you to do, it gives you the freedom and time, to digest and ponder, thoughts of the author(s), and how they apply to your state of mind and to your place in the world with those around you.

As we progress with e-readers, tablets, and other digital devices it makes me wonder if the value of the written word will decrease. As the quantity of content goes up will the quality of content become diminished? It is hard to think this won't happen. However, some surveys suggest people that read, now read more because of access to the written word through their tablets, phones and other devices. The results from just a few quick online searches reveal that 15-25% of book sales will shift to digital format by 2015 – this doesn't seem to be a huge problem for publishers because people will still pay for a book, whether it is printed or downloaded. It is the newspaper and magazine sectors that continue to regress and scuffle with the challenge of free/subscription based content. Some people are willing to pay for this content, but it has to be really good (valuable, original and only found in one place) – such as financial information, investigative journalism, or sometimes local news. For now, in these structures, the digital format is an additional distribution channel, much like the digital version of *On Course*. The digital version of *On Course* is just that, a version of the printed copy so many of you enjoy thumbing through each month.

True evolution to digital formats for newspapers and magazines will impact the way we write. Think about it. Creating long term value will not come from simply formatting magazines into a flipbook type format but will come from thinking in digital words and terminology. The way I was trained to write was to be succinct and descriptive, creating a framework for a picture in my reader's mind from the words I chose to use together. By using a common language I am able to express my thoughts and link them to my reader's thoughts to create a shared reference point. Unseemly limitless, the combination of written words that one could place on a page will pale in comparison to the new way of writing that the digitized word is evolving into with the formats currently being offered and ones to be invented.

There are a few different digital formats that are being defined today:

- **Hybrid.** Written content that is cross-bred with other media. This format is most popular in digital versions of magazines where a story may be enhanced by a linked video.
- **Nonlinear.** Do you use a blog or news compiler that through an algorithm will select articles from among hundreds and be fed to your reader? This format offers very diverse content and a new reading experience.
- **Interactive.** This format needs your input to reach a conclusion. Based upon your involvement (and not the ideas of the author) a conclusion will be drawn through a collaborative effort between the author and you, the reader.
- **Social.** The ability of a reader to immediately comment and provide feedback to an author and readers can communicate with one another has created a whole new ecosystem in which works will be produced.

I know there is hesitation that our imaginations will be weakened and eventually disappear from our cognitive makeup if every written word has some type of descriptive medium interlaced to it. However, the only thing that offers some respite is that the recording of our history as a race began with pictures on walls of caves and we still have our imaginations. I hope you enjoy your printed version of *On Course*. @