

## **EVERY SINGLE DIGITAL NEWS ROOM WITH TWENTY-SOMETHING WRITERS HAS FAILED BECAUSE THESE KIDS ARE SO STUPID AND SOCIALLY NAIVE**

- You will always be fired if you get a job in a "digital news room". You are just meat for the grinder.

- 20-something kids are too stupid to know how stupid they are

- The rest of the world sees their whining blogs and postings as the essence of the idiocy of the half-formed mind

- Venture capitalists who fund these warehouses full of kids with computers are financing failure.

"...About five years ago, I was asked to visit the newsroom at Mic, a digital-media start-up backed by venture capital and focused on news for the millennial audience.

As the public editor of The New York Times, I suppose I was seen as an expert in traditional journalism ethics - especially through the eyes of Mic's reporters and editors, mostly in their 20s, and many in their first jobs out of school. And because I was active on Twitter and writing a frequent blog, perhaps I looked like I knew how to build a bridge from old-school newspapering to the digital-first present.

I remember how smart, engaged and hopeful the Mic staffers were as we talked, in their Lower Manhattan newsroom, about topics such as conflict of interest, objectivity vs. fairness, and possible career paths.

Could this exciting venture - then only two or three years old - thrive long into the future? Could these young journalists build their lives and careers on it?

In 2013, that seemed possible, despite some flashing danger signs.

But last week, Mic was the latest of its ilk to crash and burn. More than 100 employees were fired, amid word that its staffless shell would be sold to another media company.

And because Mic's demise happened so suddenly and so mercilessly, it seemed like one of the worst.

"A gutting experience," was how top editor Kerry Lauerman, formerly of The Washington Post, put it. (Along with his boss,

Publisher Cory Haik, who also had been a Post executive, he was among those let go last week.)

For former Mic reporter Marie Solis, the gutting experience came last year when the company decided to emphasize video rather than traditional text stories.

The young Vassar graduate, who now works at broadly.com - an offshoot of Vice - told me a few weeks ago in a phone interview that she lost her job with no warning as the company pivoted.

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That move to video didn't pay off, not for Mic or the many other similar media companies that took their cues from all-powerful Facebook. The promises of more traffic - which turned out to be based on false interpretations of data - never came to fruition and as Heidi Moore wrote in the Columbia Journalism Review, "Publishers must acknowledge the pivot to video has failed."

Now Mic is being scrapped for parts, as its name and technology are being sold to Bustle for a reported \$5 million - a pittance, considering that the company had raised \$60 million in venture capital, once boasted 17 million unique visitors and had a (theoretical) valuation of more than \$100 million.

"We cannot imagine a move more cynical or perverse than terminating your entire staff, only to cede the 'brand' to a new buyer who will presumably pick the scraps from the carcass of a newsroom that we all spent years building," Mic's employee union said in a statement last week.

They have every reason to feel sold out and angry.

"When you are a good manager, you bring someone in to do good work, with the understanding that they'll be taken care of, and will have a future," said Aram Zucker-Scharff, who writes, teaches and consults about the new economy of journalism. (Also the director of advertising technology at The Post, he made it clear in a phone interview Monday that he is not speaking for our mutual employer.)

"But a lot of venture-capital-based media companies are built with the idea that your fate is to be fired," he told me, although that reality goes unsaid.

"It's unethical," he added. "You're hiring them to be disposable cogs."

And, as he wrote in a widely read Twitter thread, "the numbers were never really there. Eventually they were always going to disappear as fraudulent traffic and metrics fell apart."

What worries him, and me, is the human cost - and the cost to tomorrow's journalism - when this happens over and over again.

With the tragic demise of local newspapers, places like Mic have become the entry point into the craft for a lot of young journalists. What's more, their newsrooms have been admirably diverse, a diversity that their journalism has admirably reflected.

As they go under, such entry points disappear. And the journalists who have been through this ugly process - sometimes more than once - burn out.

"They are taking the brunt of this," Zucker-Scharff said, "and it's psychologically damaging."

As these young people search for work among few options, or leave the field altogether, journalism stands to lose a generation of diverse talent.

Maybe I should have told the Mic newsroom five years ago to get out while the getting was good - before the venture-capital bubble burst, before the pivot failed, before their workplace lost its soul.