

Tomorrow's journalist must think about the customer

One of the more uncomfortable roles for today's middle-level editors is that of marketer. While the senior editor — the leader in the corner office — understands the role of selling the newspaper, most newsroom lieutenants do not. For a variety of reasons — ethics, morality, stupidity — marketing the newspaper has taken on an evil demeanor. The founder of the popular press, Joseph Pulitzer, would probably find it amusing that today's journalists care little, if anything at all, whether the paper is purchased or even read. To quote a copy editor: "Why don't we put out the newspaper the way we want. If they don't buy it, too bad." Yes, too bad for that newspaper and those editing jobs when the newspaper closes. A First Amendment right to free speech does not guaran-

tee a right to be in business.

Regardless of whether you take on the task of pagination, marketing the newspaper is another function that should be shared throughout the newsroom.

In the emerging area of electronic delivery of news and information, the role of editor as marketer is even more pronounced. Developing customers for online services is a challenge not addressed in any journalism school, although it probably should be. Today's media editor must use a mix of solid content and interesting "stunts" to lure customers into the tent, whether it is a Web site or online area. And once you have them, you better have the content and services that will keep them visiting. Today's single-newspaper towns leave little learning opportunity for

enticing readers. The circulation wars of the 1930s are gone; the online customer wars have begun. It is too bad that newspapers can't call upon the competition experiences of the past as they face new threats and opportunities.

When looking toward the future and trying to understand how technology will affect our industry, don't forget the challenge of getting and keeping the customers. Tomorrow's journalists — from reporter to designer to managing editor — must play an increasingly more important role in getting the customer to buy our newspapers, fax services and audio lines and to visit our online areas. It doesn't matter how good the content is if nobody reads it.