

In the media, change doesn't have to mean extinction

[Martin Cloake](#)

Change is often seen, or presented, as the end of something, rather than the beginning. That seems especially true in the media business, where the advent of digital media has prompted a plethora of 'end of' stories. The end of print, the end of sub-editing, the end of books, the end of professional photography... Where will it all end?

Of course, most of those things haven't ended, any more than writers' and readers' need for a dramatic headline has ended. But they have changed. And with change lies opportunity.

Dave Lee, the BBC technology correspondent, blogged an interesting piece earlier this week headlined '[Why technology journalists are facing extinction](#)'. It turned out to be another piece where the attention-grabbing headline didn't quite put across his argument. Because what he was actually saying was that the job of technology correspondent is changing, which meant technology correspondents "need to give up thinking of ourselves as technology reporters and instead think of ourselves as tech-savvy hacks on other beats".

He didn't say it was the end of technology journalism. Instead he recognised what was changing in order to prepare for how to adjust his approach. He likened the process to realising "it's utterly pointless to learn how to use a computer just so you know how to use a computer. Far better to learn how to use a computer so you can go on and do something exciting with it."

Print, books, sub-editing and professional photography, to name but a few, turn out to have been pronounced dead prematurely. They all survive, but not in the manner they did before.

The point here is that seeing change as a threat and trying to prevent it is utterly unproductive, if not destructive. What's happened to photography is a case in point.

Some years ago, I sat in on a discussion in which some professional photographers argued that people who weren't professional photographers should not be 'allowed' to take photographs. I was as astonished then as I was when I heard the argument rolled out again recently. Good luck with that.

Now, it's true that professional photographers have been one of the most hard hit of media tradespeople. Staff photographers have almost entirely disappeared, and surviving as a freelance practising a trade that requires the upkeep and regular upgrade of expensive equipment is very tough. But in an age when pretty much everyone has a high

quality camera in the phone they carry with them, and in which taking and swapping images is second nature, talk of restricting who takes photographs is absurd.

It also misses the opportunity to argue for quality, skill and judgement. Snapping a quick mugshot is very different to getting a good shot of Mario Götze scoring the winner in the World Cup final, for example. I'd always commission a professional photographer, with an expert eye, proper kit and judgement borne of experience for the World Cup job. But for the mugshot, it's likely to be the reporter with a phone. Because you can.

The demands of the market are often used to justify why skills are no longer needed, and it's that threat to continued employment that prompts many to adopt defence mode when changes to the way they do their job present themselves. [Magazine consultant Peter Jackson, in the latest edition of InPublishing, argues that the tendency of many media businesses to see digitisation as a way of cutting costs has left them poorly positioned to provide quality content.](#) He is right.

What Dave Lee's approach shows is that those who have the skills and experience are well-placed to work out how best to apply them in changing circumstances. And there are benefits there for all of us.