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## Curse of Youth

**Two new Dallas papers are keeping tabs on the little futhermuckers**  
BY ERIC CELESTE

I've waited long enough. For years, I've sat by the phone patiently, expecting to get the call. The conversation would be brief:

"Mr. Celeste, this is a Big Media Company. We'd like to pay you a huge consulting fee to tell us how to reach young readers."

I would chuckle, crack my knuckles and, once the check cleared, tell the Big Media Company how all its problems could be solved, tell it the secret to reaching that elusive, desirable, seductive chimera known as the 18- to 34-year-old reader.

Alas, now two daily, tabloid-sized publications have debuted in Dallas--*Quick*, published by *The Dallas Morning News*, and *A.M. Journal Express*, published by a former president of the *DMN*. Each one is aimed primarily at young people, so that phone call seems unlikely. They will battle each other for this important niche market until one--or none--survives.

Lucky for you, good reader. Because now you get this prized information free. You may use it to start your own print product, aimed at the aforementioned demo. But, please, when confronted with this wisdom--so profound it must be italicized to indicate fully its insightfulness--use it for good, not evil. Give the profits to the poor, or, at the very least, to the Democrats.

Here it is:

*If you want your newspaper to appeal to young people, you must be willing to print the word "fuck."*

There it is! Use it wisely! Remember me when you're rich!



**Guide appears every Friday in *The Dallas Morning News*...oh...wait a minute...**

In other media news this week, *D* magazine published a rather interesting list of the "best doctors" in town, which...Huh?...Why?

My editor says I need to explain the whole "fuck" thing more fully. This is exactly the reason most newspapers fail now. These old-school journalists get all up in your grill about "context."

OK, where to start? See, newspapers are losing young readers. More than half of the people who read *The Dallas Morning News* or the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* are older than 50. They are people for whom reading a newspaper is a habit, like drinking a cup of coffee or Googling "full-length Paris

Hilton video" is a habit for you and me.

But people age 18 to 34--hereinafter "young people"--don't read newspapers with the same frequency as previous generations. Thus the spate of new easy-to-read, easily digestible newspapers, like the two we mentioned earlier. (Although, they're not aimed at young people so much as they are at young ad buyers who place ads aimed at young people, but that's a column I'm writing for *Ad Age*.) For a long time, Big Media Company honchos have theorized that young people don't read their papers because young people are stupid and don't read. This theory is wrong. Many young people read books, for example. A study done last year by the Pew Center found that more people in that age range read a book every day than read a newspaper.

That's because books often have at least one of three qualities that young people demand, things few dailies have: 1) They're smartly written, because kids are smarter than you think; 2) they're useful, while much of what is in newspapers can be found easily and quickly online; and 3) they reflect the world young people live in.

Let's examine how these apply to our new daily tabloids. As to No. 1: No product produced by a daily newspaper is going to be smartly written. Most newspapers spend all their time teaching journalists how to appeal to the largest possible gaggle of readers, which means never using post-fourth-grade vocabulary words like "gaggle." Even well-written newspapers such as *The Washington Post* have produced "youth-aimed" products that don't pass this test. Smartly written publications must be willing to offend those of average or below-average intelligence, and newspapers will never do that. Youth-aimed papers that suggest they are succeeding with "attitude"--*Quick* is supposed to have a healthy sprinkling of attitude--are sure goners.

If you can't be "edgy" or have "attitude," then you must have utility, which brings us to No. 2. This is indeed where these papers come closest to succeeding. I laugh (Ha!) at those who say the quick-read daily metropolitan paper insults people's intelligence because the stories are short and much of them are wire stories. Have you ever read The Associated Press wire? It's better written and more compelling than 90 percent of daily newspapers. Readers pay no attention--none--to bylines. You think I'm wrong only if you work in journalism and your self-identity is caught up in that lie.

As for the idea that a quick read is insulting, sorry, it's welcoming. It's 4:11 p.m., and I haven't read the paper yet today...and it's my job to read the paper. That's because this morning I had to help my daughter with her schoolwork; take the dog on a 25-minute poo-jaunt because he won't go out in the rain by himself; rush to a meeting with my Realtor; call the damned New Times insurance people who insist I don't work here and therefore won't pay my dentist; finish a freelance project for a friend; go to the gym because otherwise I'm just wasting that \$67 a month; schedule time to see my poker buddy who had an emergency appendectomy and ask him if it was the straight I drew on fifth street that did it to him; do two more interviews for this column (turns out I will have space to quote none of them...nice); and...well, you get the idea.

When do I have time to read the newspaper? When does *anyone*? We--me, you, "young people," everyone--will make time for the information that we need and can't get anywhere else. That's it. Otherwise, we're outta time. In that way, the *AMJE*, which was on my desk, helped me because I scanned it quickly and got a taste of some international and national news I thought important.

So, to answer the question I've gotten 400 times, I like that one better, the *AMJE* one. So far. But it's gonna be a long hard slog for each. True, they're both in it for years, because the *DMN* is scared, and because the guy at *AMJE* got hosed by the *DMN* when he was there years ago (not that he says this, but, trust me, I know). I believe it's personal, even if both sides say it isn't.

Which brings us to No. 3. This is key. Young people want the world as they see it: without filters. It's why they love *The Daily Show*. Because it's smart, informed, crude and passionate. Like young

people. Young people will argue vehemently with you for hours about party politics, about religion, about love and war and peace and that weird new \$20 bill. They will curse when they argue, using words like "fuck." Then, once they are done, they will go out to a bar and get fucking blasted-ass drunk and go home with another young person and fuck like bunnies until they pass out. That's their world, and if you wanna live in it, you'd better print it.

Which is why we at the *Dallas Observer* are not worried about these papers. We're not scared of f\*  
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