

Politics and the financial crisis

ABSTRACT

Two major events had dominating effects on the New Zealand media in 2008. The general election was a demanding time in which the media played an active role beyond simply reporting events and came under scrutiny almost as much as the politicians. The international financial crisis became real for the world economy including New Zealand during the year. It cut advertising revenue, leading to financial stresses which had multiple effects on the media as for the rest of the economy. Covering the crisis in all its unpleasant innovation, historical parallels and complexity was also a test of journalists and media outlets in New Zealand as elsewhere. Meanwhile, digital media have continued to expand their coverage, influence, and financial impact, forcing the conventional media to change the way they see the world. In New Zealand this was emphasised by a wide-ranging regulatory review. It is remarkable that ownership of the media has remained largely stable during the year. This is as much a result of the credit crunch as despite it: one of the major owners tried to sell and failed. The ownership continues to be highly concentrated with further acquisitions and centralisation by the major owners. This second annual survey of the media also looks at some developments between the law and the media and changes in the newspaper, internet, magazine, television and radio segments.¹

BILL ROSENBERG

Media researcher, CAFCA

Introduction

TWO major events had dominating effects on the New Zealand media in 2008. The general election was a demanding time which brought the media under scrutiny almost as much as the politicians. The international financial crisis became real for the world economy including New Zealand during the year. It cut advertising revenue and threatened indebted companies, leading to financial stresses which had multiple effects

on the media as for the rest of the economy. Covering the crisis in all its unpleasant innovation, historical parallels and complexity was also a test of journalists and media outlets in New Zealand as elsewhere. It is remarkable that ownership of the media has remained largely stable during this period. This is as much a result of the credit crunch as despite it: one of the major owners tried to sell and failed. Another continued the centralisation and rationalisation of its operations. Along the way, digital media have continued to expand their coverage, influence, and financial impact, forcing the rest of the media to change the way they see the world.

General

The general election

A general election is a testing time for the news media. Fairness, accuracy and balance are all under intense observation, and journalists themselves are more than usually in the public eye as they report on and question the political hopefuls. How did the media fare in the 2008 General Election?

More than most elections, the 2008 campaign was one in which the media were active participants. The long-running investigation of Winston Peters by *Dominion Post* and other journalists had a marked effect on the tone of the election, and almost certainly affected the result. Without it, Labour might still be in government, supported by New Zealand First. That is not to say that it was wrong to investigate, though the motivation for it and the energy devoted to it was questioned by some (eg. Trotter, 2008a), but it certainly illustrated the power of the media.

If Peters came out of the election as the vaudeville villain, the man you love to loathe (a part he played with gusto), then John Key was portrayed as fresh, new Mr Nice Guy, and Helen Clark as hugely competent, perhaps *too* competent, but past her use-by date. Whether those stereotypes really represented public views or were as much a media creation is one of the big questions of the election coverage.

An exceptional effort by the *New Zealand Herald* assisted Key's image building. In July 2008, at a time when in the words of the *Herald* itself, Key remained 'relatively unknown', it published more than 25,000 words on every aspect of his life (du Chateau, Oliver, & Bingham, 2008). In addition, it created a substantial collection of material including an 'interactive timeline' plus audio recordings and a gallery of photographs on its web site, along with

the articles themselves. Hagiographic headlines included ‘I’m more liberal than I look’, ‘In touch with his romantic side’, as well as the main stories entitled ‘In search of John Key’, and ‘John Key: The man who would be PM’. The *Herald* called the collection ‘John Key—the unauthorised biography’. Unauthorised it might have been, but it had his full cooperation at an ideal time for building his credibility as a potential Prime Minister. Most of the writing was by senior *Herald* journalists Carroll du Chateau, Paula Oliver and Eugene Bingham. Du Chateau and Oliver were recruited soon after the election into Key’s support team. They joined yet another former *Herald* political reporter Kevin Taylor who had become Key’s chief press secretary (Bunting, 2008). Moves such as these by reporters always raise questions of journalistic ethics, but these circumstances were particularly remarkable. (The *Herald* was not the only source of journalists for the new government’s PR machine: *National Business Review*’s Ben Thomas went to mind the Attorney-General and Arts Minister; *The Independent*’s Nick Bryant to the Housing Minister; TV3’s Stephen Parker to the Minister of Economic Development; TV1 *Sunday* programme’s Jackie Maher to the Health Minister; and Newstalk ZB’s Helene Ambler to the Minister of Education (Boag, 2008; Drinnan, 2008c).)

The media focus on party leaders was confirmed in an analysis of media coverage of the election by political scientist Dr Babak Bahador, of the University of Canterbury (Bahador, 2008). He carried out a content analysis of the *New Zealand Herald*, *Dominion Post* and *Press* and TV1 and TV3 evening news programmes from the announcement of the election on 12 September until the day before the election, 7 November 2008.

In raw coverage, Labour got 38.2 percent of the coverage to 33.5 percent for National, perhaps reflecting the advantage of the ruling party. Minor party coverage roughly reflected their votes, except for the Māori Party which received 8.0 percent of the coverage compared to its 2.4 percent vote.

On the other hand, the media’s fascination with National’s John Key showed: he easily led the media coverage of party leaders with 40.5 percent (which was 6.6 percent more negative than positive). Helen Clark was on only 25.7 percent—surprisingly low given she was Prime Minister (3.2 percent more positive than negative).

Did the media have favourites? Bahador reports that analytical pieces, which accounted for 18 percent of the stories surveyed, turned out as follows:

While National received 15.6 percent net negative news story coverage versus Labour at 8.2 percent, Labour received 18.7 percent net negative analysis story coverage versus National at 15.3 percent. This suggests that when stories were based on events and relied largely on external sourcing (including other parties and party leaders), National received more negative references. However, when stories came from journalists themselves and reflected their opinions, Labour received more negative references

For the coverage of party leaders, 15 percent was analysis. Again Bahador reports a contrast between the tones of news and analysis:

John Key received 7 percent more negative news story references than positive while Helen Clark had net 4.7 percent positive news story references. However, Helen Clark had net 5.2 percent negative analysis story references versus John Key at net 4.5 percent negative. As with their respective parties, the Labour leader received more negative coverage than the National leader when journalists provided their own analysis and opinions.

This reinforces the impression that many in the news media had decided that Labour's time had ended and reflected that in their commentary.

Policy was a big issue for the election: there was a glaring lack of it. National presented precious few policy differences to Labour: certainly not enough to give voters any idea of what it intended to do to carry out its advertised aspirations of regaining wage parity with Australia, increasing productivity and growth rates. Yet, even when tapes surreptitiously recorded at National's annual conference in the Michael Fowler Centre in Wellington in August provided prima facie evidence of another agenda, the media did very little to follow them up and investigate what National might really do. Instead the National Party's diversionary spin became the story: who made the recording? Was it Labour? *Independent* columnist Chris Trotter for example (Trotter, 2008b) recounted a news conference where then National finance spokesman Bill English, who had been taped saying that (contrary to stated National policy) Kiwibank would be sold 'eventually', admitted to having 'misspoken'. English tried to blame it on a dirty tricks campaign in some way involving Nicky Hager, the investigative journalist whose book *The Hollow Men* (Hager, 2006) alerted New Zealanders to the spin tactics of the National

Party and the covert intentions of many of its power brokers and backers, prior to the 2005 election. Trotter:

A morally engaged press gallery would have groaned loudly and rolled their eyes at such a blatant attempt at media misdirection, and Key would have been challenged to present the evidence of this outrageous assertion. What actually happened was nothing... Not one of the dozen or so senior journalists present challenged Key to put up or shut up.

Similarly, the Christchurch *Press* while covering the initial story, very quickly let the substance fade, and followed it up largely with progress reports on tracking down who might have made the tape ('Poor-quality footage lets tape culprit off hook,' 2008). Coverage by political editor Colin Espiner (Espiner, 2008b) focused on how badly he considered National had handled the event, advised Key on how to get back on track, and rationalised why the tapes did not really reveal a secret agenda: 'Watergate it is not'. He speculated that Labour might yet be linked to the tapes (it never was), giving further momentum to National's spin.

It is not that 'who done it' was not a story, but no major news outlet (except the *Sunday Star-Times* through Hager himself (e.g. Hager, 2008)) felt a responsibility to spend some energy finding out if there really was more to National's intentions than they were willing to say in public. That should be done for any political party, but given that Hager had documented that National had a hidden agenda in the 2005 election, National's absence of publicly announced substantive policy in this election other than 'me too', Key's own record of inconsistency over his short political career (e.g. Else, 2008), and policy inconsistencies between National spokespeople leading up to the election, the responsibility was even greater. There were hints, particularly in the business pages, that different things were being said behind closed doors, such as Merrill Lynch's report regarding ACC that 'National was quietly telling insurers to prepare for privatisation' (Eaton, 2008), and *Independent* senior business writer Jenni McManus's observation that 'for the past year, Key and English have been dodging anything that smells like policy commitment, telling private business dinners in Auckland and in Wellington that many of these matters will be decided when they get elected—or words to that effect' (McManus, 2008b). Not even former ACT candidate and Treasury Secretary Graham Scott thought National was telling the whole story: 'Under John Key

National has been careful to put out messages that it's now a pragmatic party of the centre, Mr Scott adds. "I'm not sure if that's true." (Janes, 2008) The media lazily, naively or willingly fell for the spin line.

The business media (as is often the case) did best in trying to draw out the distinctions between the two parties' announced policies (e.g. Janes, 2008; Oram, 2008, and a series of articles by McManus in *The Independent*), but in general it was still on the basis of what parties said in public, rather than what they might be intending. Business media were, explicitly or not, generally supportive of the Centre-Right (the *Sunday Star-Times* and its business columnist Rod Oram was an exception), although McManus grew almost apoplectic in her despair at National's lack of policy, particularly in the shadow of the gathering financial crisis, both in her *Independent* columns—'For months, this newspaper has been urging National leader John Key to give business and consumers some guidance about surviving in an economy that has ground swiftly and brutally to a halt' (McManus, 2008a, 2008b) —and in her television appearances.

Where the business media filled a particularly gaping hole in the political coverage was in spelling out the implications of the rapidly gathering international financial crisis. The coverage lacked depth, but in general gave an overview of the events and some indication of the policy debates that were underway. But this was an issue that held public interest well beyond the business pages. While the government was clearly hard at work on guarantees for bank deposits and wholesale borrowing, and there were other short-term defensive measures being stitched together in official circles, neither major party announced any significant shift in their economic policies to cope in the longer term. The closest Labour got was to say it had withdrawn further spending promises and would have a mini-budget in December if re-elected. What its content would be remained sketchy. National appeared to be relying on its tax cuts and infrastructure spending, both designed for different times.

One example of the poverty of the political coverage of the crisis came when Key opportunistically offered to work with the government on a wholesale guarantee of bank borrowing, already under consideration. It was unclear that this was either urgent or good policy, and an intense debate on this was reflected in the business pages. But the *Press*'s front page on 20 October 2008 for example headlined Key's move as 'Key eyes plan to save NZ banking', saying he 'wants Labour to work with National' to implement a guarantee

before the election (Espiner, 2008a). This was at a time when the authorities were assuring New Zealand that the banks were sound and did not need 'saving'. The newspaper's own business pages the next day reported banking expert Godfrey Boyce counselling that 'rushing a scheme through could create distortions which would make it harder for the corporate sector and local authorities to raise money' ('Scheme "has to benefit Kiwi economy"', 2008). None of this was reflected in the front page story; instead the impression was of a white knight coming to if not rescue, at least prod into action a recalcitrant government. The *Dominion Post* had a more neutral front page, mixing Key's offer with Labour's announcement of cuts to its election promises due to the crisis, but showed no sign of the policy debate (Watkins, 2008). The *New Zealand Herald* covered the story on the front page but below the fold. Headlined 'Govt sees through Key's bipartisan play', it took a much more sceptical view of Key's motives, though still not reflecting policy issues (Armstrong, 2008).

Bahador's study included an analysis of media coverage of 'policy' versus 'non-policy' issues. Non-policy issues included discussion of coalition forming and MMP, polls, public opinion, the campaign itself, marketing and advertising, the Peters investigation and other scandals. The coverage was virtually equally split: 50.4 percent on policy issues and 49.6 percent on non-policy issues. So policy debate and media analysis of policy were weak in the campaign.

The centrepiece of TV coverage was the leaders' debates. As in the last election, there was a spat over whether minor party leaders should be included. This time the leaders of the major parties formed a cartel and refused to appear if the minor parties were invited. While the debates have gladiatorial entertainment value, it is doubtful what information function they serve. The major party leaders came carefully prepped with answers that would not have been new to the electorate. The main question became whether the new boy on the block, John Key, would fluff his lines. He didn't, and proved better than Clark at appearing spontaneous and using plain language. It was a mark of the banality of the debates that this was treated by some commentators as a win. Even the questions from panels seemed to play with the peripheral rather than digging deeper into real policy intentions. One example from TVNZ political editor, Guyon Espiner: 'have you ever broken the law?' ('ONE News Election 08 Leaders Debate: The Decider,' 2008, in Chapter 4, at 4:13 of the online video). TVNZ did introduce the innovation of interspersing questions from

viewers recorded on YouTube videos. Some of their questions were more probing than those of the political journalists.

Just outside the main stream, the independent internet news site Scoop, did a solid and engaging job of bringing together both its bread and butter of disintermediated news, so the public could see what the various parties and interest groups were actually saying, intermediated news (including video feeds from TV3) and probing commentary led by heavyweight investigative journalist Gordon Campbell.

The election covered the media, just as the media covered the election. One of National's earliest policy announcements was that it would scrap TVNZ's charter and make its \$15 million in public funding contestable through New Zealand On Air (NZOA). This was shortly after the government had taken the money away from TVNZ's direct control by giving it to NZOA to be used only with its approval. Effectively, TVNZ was working under supervision for its charter responsibilities after the government, understandably, saw as misuse TVNZ's spending the funding on programmes such as *New Zealand Idol*, *Mucking In* and for buying the rights to the Olympics in China. Naturally, MediaWorks supported National's proposal. MediaWorks Chief Executive Office Brent Impey put out a media release saying: 'This is an excellent policy if for no other reason than it creates greater fairness and transparency with taxpayer funding of broadcasting. Making TVNZ's charter funds contestable is an effective way to stop the Crown's subsidisation of TVNZ.' Logical enough from a company that would benefit from the policy, but Impey seemed to have learned nothing from history: 'Most importantly, for viewers, this policy would create greater diversity in the content they enjoy on their screens' (Impey, 2008). The commercial-laden, non-diverse but commercially safe programming of the 1990s resulting from policies similar to National's proposals, had been conveniently forgotten. Head of the Broadcasting School at Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology, Paul Norris, said the National policy 'makes no sense'.

... the most significant aspect of National's policy is not the handing of the Charter money to NZOA, it is the abandoning of the Charter. Without the Charter, the problems of the nineties will simply be revisited. The Charter has not been working as well as it should have, but the answer is to address the problem not to abandon the concept altogether.

The only logical conclusion of National's policy is that TVNZ will be sold off to the highest bidder ... (Norris, 2008)

Peter Thompson, senior lecturer in Unitec's School of Communication Studies, was concerned about both National and Labour's policies on the Charter and public interest broadcasting. 'In their efforts to keep up election-year appearances, both Labour and National are selling the New Zealand public impoverished notions of public broadcasting,' he wrote. National's policy '... appears to be little more than a reversion to the free market "Rogernomics" ideology of the 1980s and 1990s' (Thompson, 2008b).

Digital broadcasting

The Ministry for Culture and Heritage undertook a regulatory review of digital broadcasting during 2008. It raised fundamental issues across the media and communications spectrum. Central were the questions of how to protect and enhance the crucial social nature of the media, including policy issues such as public broadcasting, local content and control.

As academics Peter Thompson and Wayne Hope pointed out, the conceptualisation is at least as important as the technology. Should this realm be considered a 'market' with some public interest measures imposed upon it? Or should it be considered a domain of public interest in which the market may have a role? The problem 'stems less from technological convergence and overlapping institutional responsibilities and more from tensions between market and public sphere objectives', wrote Hope (Hope, 2008; Thompson, 2008a).

The review attracted 85 submissions. In September 2008, Cabinet approved further work in three main areas: 'a review of the institutional arrangements for regulation of broadcasting and telecommunications; a competition study to consider potential risks to access to premium content and to platforms; and development of options for enhanced public service broadcasting including diversity of local content, and content standards.' The political decisions on all three would be heavily influenced by views of whether the 'market' will resolve all concerns, or whether further government action is necessary. There were few clues from the election policy of the National-led government as to their approach. They did promise to maintain state ownership of TVNZ, continue support for Māori TV, and continue funding for Radio New Zealand (National Party, 2008). While avowing support for public broadcasting, it was not clear what they meant by the term, as Paul Norris pointed out (above).

It was the market versus public interest debate at its rawest that was

most publicly aired during the review. TVNZ and MediaWorks (owner of the RadioWorks radio networks and television channels TV3 and C4 through TVWorks) both made submissions calling for regulation of Sky's dominant position in digital television, and its ability to outbid the two rival free-to-air networks for acquiring programmes and sports coverage. TVNZ called for the break-up of Sky into 'service' (content) provider and 'infrastructure' (signal and set-top box) provider. Both TVNZ and TVWorks called for Sky to be forced to divest itself of the free-to-air channel, Prime, which they said gets preferential access to Sky sports coverage. They provided examples of how Sky outbid them for programming, using Prime as a lever. Both considered there should be 'anti-siphoning' controls which ensure that one operator (i.e. Sky) cannot buy exclusive coverage of events of public significance such as live games in the main national sports. TVNZ argued for more local content and Charter funding, and ring-fencing of its Charter funding, Māori and other minority programming. TVWorks wanted more funding, but for it to be open to all. (Television New Zealand, 2008; TVWorks Limited, 2008)

In essence, the battle lines were clearly drawn on the basis of the respective interests of the providers. Sky furiously attacked TVNZ for its call for Sky's break-up and access to its sport events (Pullar-Strecker, 2008a, 2008b). Its submission opposed any regulatory change. All government funding for programming should be contestable. It took a purist market view: 'SKY considers that regulation must not be imposed unless there is evidence of a problem.' (Sky Network Television Limited, 2008, pp. 1-3)

There are numerous other issues raised by the review (Sky considered it far too broad and well beyond its intended scope). If the incoming government had been so minded, this could have led to a significant reframing of our media's regulatory environment. In fact, in the new year, National announced it would abandon the work of the review. Saying that 'departmental analysis of submissions made during the review process concluded that the current market appears workably competitive and that there are no compelling indications of future issues', despite the analysis in fact being explicitly divided over the need for regulation, it was taking a market view and letting the market take its course (Joyce & Coleman, 2009).

Media and the law

As we noted in our 2007 review (Rosenberg, 2008b, p. 187):

Fairfax risked compromising court hearings in November 2007 by publishing conversations recorded by police during investigations of what they alleged were terrorist activities in the Ureweras. Despite a ruling by the Solicitor-General that terrorism charges were not justified, the *Dominion Post* and other Fairfax publications published lengthy reports on the conversations without attributing them to particular individuals. The implication was that the allegations of planning terrorist actions were justified. In April 2008 the Solicitor-General announced he was prosecuting Fairfax New Zealand and the *Dominion Post's* editor, Tim Pankhurst, for criminal contempt of court, saying that the reports could compromise the ability of the defendants to a fair trial. ('Fairfax NZ, editor to be prosecuted,' 2008)

In May 2008, the police issued formal warnings to six Fairfax editors and a reporter over their coverage of the investigation. In a finding thought to be unprecedented, police investigators determined that the journalists had a case to answer under Section 312K of the *Crimes Act* which prevents any person publishing information gathered using an interception warrant except 'in the performance of that person's duty' ('Police issue formal warning to editors over terrorism probe,' 2008).

The criminal contempt charges against Fairfax and Pankhurst were heard in September 2008. The High Court dismissed the charges, but they had anything but a clear win. The dismissal was based on the practical effect of the publication: it was 'not proved beyond reasonable doubt that, as a matter of practical reality, the actions of the respondents in publishing the Fairfax articles caused a real risk of interference with the administration of justice by compromising the fair trial rights of the accused' (Solicitor-General v. Fairfax, 2008 [134]) Because the trial would occur two years or more after the publication of the articles, 'the extent to which jurors might be prejudicially affected' at the actual time of trial would be limited.

However the Court censured Fairfax and Pankhurst in strong terms. 'Fairfax knew of the existence of the suppression orders and ought to have known of the terms of those orders. At the least, there was a reckless failure to ascertain the correct position before publication' [135]. 'There was a faint suggestion on behalf of the respondents that they might have been under a duty to disclose the intercepted communications on the basis they had a duty to the public to publish the material. We are satisfied that this suggestion has no proper foundation... To suggest that what they did was somehow in

the best traditions of responsible and fearless journalism is not sustainable. Publications which are unlawful can never be regarded as responsible or justifiable, as the other media organisations holding the same material responsibly recognised' [71 and 137]. Indeed, the Court expressed surprise that they were not prosecuted, and warned that the decision should not 'be taken as suggesting that publications of this kind, in other circumstances, may not amount to a contempt of court' [138], [139].

In the High Court, Justice John Fogarty tried to set new rules for court filming and photography during the trial of Lipine Sila for murder in May 2008. He refused media permission to film or photograph Sila, comparing it to 'the ancient punishment of pillory' contrary to the non-binding In-Court Media Coverage Guidelines (Courts of New Zealand, 2003; Judge bemuses experts, 2008). However in another trial with another judge just days later, High Court Justice Patrick Keane, took a different view. He allowed the media to film and take photos, explaining it was up to the 'complete discretion' of each judge, and disputed Fogarty's comparison with pillory (R v Crutchley, 2008; Suddaby, 2008).

Another judicial ruling brought press freedom, rights of accused persons, and the strengths of the internet head to head. In a Youth Court case in August 2008, Judge David Harvey issued a suppression order which allowed two accused to be named in all media except online, on the basis that unlike human memory, material on the internet could be 'recalled' months later, and may include factual material no longer valid, handicapping a fair trial (Bell, 2008). Some private citizens immediately took the order as a challenge and published the names on web sites around the world, but the media themselves tried to respect the order. The difficulties became apparent as it affected sites such as TradeMe and all the media's own online outlets. Virtually all the major media organisations united in challenging the ruling and Judge Harvey lifted the suppression order. He saw the issue as finding an appropriate balance between rights to freedom of expression and to a fair trial. (MacLennan, 2008)

Media Sectors

Newspapers

The daily and weekly newspapers continued their circulation slide (Audit Bureau of Circulations, 2008b). As Table 1 shows, the loss of circulation

Table 1: Circulation of daily press with circulation over 25,000

| Publication | Owner | 30/6/2008 | 30/3/2007 | Increase 15 months to 2008 (percent) | 30/3/2003 | Increase 5 years to 2008 (per cent) |
|-------------------|---------|-----------|-----------|---|-----------|--|
| NZ Herald | ANM | 187,129 | 195,681 | -4.37 | 210,910 | -11.28 |
| Dominion Post | Fairfax | 94,598 | 98,326 | -3.79 | 99,089 | -4.53 |
| Press | Fairfax | 87,221 | 90,030 | -3.12 | 91,111 | -4.27 |
| Otago Daily Times | Fairfax | 41,711 | 43,469 | -4.04 | 44,546 | -6.36 |
| Waikato Times | Fairfax | 41,209 | 41,430 | -0.53 | 40,972 | -0.58 |
| Southland Times | Fairfax | 29,000 | 29,059 | -0.20 | 29,928 | -3.10 |
| Hawkes Bay Today | Allied | 26,226 | 26,946 | -2.67 | 30,079 | -12.81 |
| Daily News | ANM | 26,060 | 26,522 | -1.74 | 26,687 | -2.35 |
| Total | | 533,154 | 551,463 | -3.32 | 573,322 | -7.01 |

Source: (Audit Bureau of Circulations, 2008b). ANM is APN News and Media

by the dailies with circulation over 25,000 has accelerated. In total they lost 3.3 percent of their audited circulation over the 15 months to June 2008, compared to losing 0.7 percent in the 12 months to September the previous year. None of them are holding their own, and in general, the bigger they were, the faster they fell, with the *Herald*, *Dominion Post*, *Press*, and *Otago Daily Times* (regaining its fourth spot from the *Waikato Times*) all losing at least 3 percent. These losses were in the face of a national population increase over the year of 1 percent. Over the five year period, regional population increases made every one of them look worse (Statistics New Zealand, 2004, 2008a, 2008b). The losses were also before the 2008 recession really got underway.

The dailies with a circulation under 25,000 lost ground at only slightly lower rate than the metropolitans (see Table 2). Whereas in 2007 the two remaining independents did the best, increasing their circulations, in the 15 months to June 2008 both lost circulation, though less than the average 2.9 percent. Instead the best of the bunch were all from the corporate stables.

Even the small number of ‘non-daily press’ titles with audited circulation figures (Table 3) lost circulation. These small provincial papers all had increased their circulation against the trend in 2007.

The weekly press (Table 4) fared similarly to the dailies, but with considerable variation. As in 2007, the *Herald on Sunday* continued to gain circulation, and slightly faster than the Auckland region’s population growth.

Table 2: Circulation of daily press with circulation under 25,000

| Publication | Owner | 30/6/2008 | 31/3/2007 | Increase 15 months to 2008 (percent) | 31/3/2003 | Increase 5 years to 2008 (percent) |
|-------------------------|---------|-----------|-----------|--------------------------------------|-----------|------------------------------------|
| Bay of Plenty Times | ANM | 22,674 | 23,179 | -2.18 | 23,285 | -2.62 |
| Manawatu Standard | Fairfax | 19,087 | 20,165 | -5.35 | 20,357 | -6.24 |
| Nelson Mail | Fairfax | 17,206 | 17,497 | -1.66 | 18,312 | -6.04 |
| Northern Advocate | ANM | 14,515 | 15,012 | -3.31 | 15,112 | -3.95 |
| Timaru Herald | Fairfax | 14,126 | 14,120 | 0.04 | 14,360 | -1.63 |
| Wanganui Chronicle | ANM | 12,023 | 12,532 | -4.06 | 13,103 | -8.24 |
| Daily Post | ANM | 10,817 | 11,796 | -8.30 | 11,979 | -9.70 |
| Gisborne Herald | Ind | 8,570 | 8,667 | -1.12 | 8,573 | -0.03 |
| Wairarapa Times-Age | ANM | 7,302 | 7,276 | 0.36 | 7,585 | -3.73 |
| Ashburton Guardian | Ind | 5,619 | 5,670 | -0.90 | 5,554 | 1.17 |
| Greymouth Evening Star* | Allied | NA | 4,383 | NA | 4,266 | NA |
| Oamaru Mail | ANM | 3,247 | 3,446 | -5.77 | 3,464 | -6.26 |
| Daily Chronicle* | ANM | 2,701 | 2,661 | 1.50 | 3,789 | -28.71 |
| Total | | 137,887 | 146,404 | -2.91 | 149,739 | -5.21 |

Source: (Audit Bureau of Circulations, 2008b)

* The Greymouth Evening Star had no circulation in 2008. It is excluded from that column's total and the total percentage changes. The Daily Chronicle was formerly the Horowhenua-Kapiti Chronicle

Table 3: Circulation of non-daily press

| Publication | Owner | 30/6/2008 | 31/3/2007 | Increase 15 months to 2008 (percent) | 31/3/2003 | Increase 5 years to 2008 (percent) |
|---------------------|---------|-----------|-----------|--------------------------------------|-----------|------------------------------------|
| Marlborough Express | Fairfax | 10,030 | 10,381 | -3.38 | 10,173 | 1.41 |
| Whakatane Beacon* | Ind | 8,052 | 8,412 | -4.28 | NA | NA |
| Northland Age | Ind | 6,308 | 6,454 | -2.26 | 5,467 | 15.38 |
| Westport News* | Ind | 1,878 | NA | NA | NA | NA |
| Total* | | 26,268 | 25,247 | -3.39 | 15,640 | 4.46 |

Source: Audit Bureau of Circulations, 2008b)

* Newspapers had no circulation audits where indicated. Affected totals exclude those titles.

Fairfax's *Independent* only managed to stand still in its effort to win back its circulation. But at least it was doing better than the other three weekly newspapers. Its direct rival *National Business Review* continued its high level

Table 4: Circulation of audited weekly press

| Publication | Owner | 30/3/2008 | 31/3/2007 | Increase 15 months to 2008 (percent) | 31/3/2003 | Increase 5 years to 2008 (percent) |
|--------------------------|---------|-----------|-----------|---|-----------|---|
| Sunday Star-Times | Fairfax | 176,020 | 181,127 | -2.82 | 203,901 | -13.67 |
| Herald on Sunday* | ANM | 93,665 | 91,521 | 2.34 | — | — |
| Sunday News | Fairfax | 87,171 | 90,857 | -4.06 | 110,136 | -20.85 |
| National Business Review | Ind | 11,114 | 11,910 | -6.68 | 13,401 | -17.07 |
| Independent | Fairfax | 3,736 | 3,729 | 0.19 | 9,680 | -61.40 |
| Total* | | 371,706 | 379,144 | -1.96 | 337,118 | -17.52 |

Source: (Audit Bureau of Circulations, 2008b)

* Total for 2003 and 5-year percentage increase excludes Herald on Sunday (which did not exist in 2003).

of losses, down 6.7 percent. The two Fairfax Sundays, were losing more than could be accounted for by the *Herald on Sunday's* gains: the *Sunday News* was down 4.1 percent and the *Sunday Times* 2.8 percent.

During the course of the year, Fairfax took a major lunge at the centralisation that had been increasingly apparent in the group. In June, Fairfax announced a new web site, *businessday.co.nz*, to bring 'national and international news and data to the New Zealand business community'. It operates from a 'dedicated news room in Auckland' and takes news from 'local sources including Fairfax Media's BusinessDay newspaper bureau, *The Independent*, *stuff.co.nz*; and international sources such as the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *Melbourne Age*, and Fairfax Media's Australian *businessday* online site'. The site also includes blogs from columnists which allow readers' comments. 'We then reverse publish selected comments back into the paper.' (Businessday.co.nz, 2008; An Introduction to BusinessDay.co.nz, 2008)

One experienced journalist with some insider knowledge described the new BusinessDay service as a 'sort of business NZPA' for Fairfax—and another step in undermining the Press Association (and with it, the remaining independent newspapers). Just days before the BusinessDay launch, NZPA announced plans to cut seven of its 55 employees, including six journalists, in order to 'streamline' its news gathering operations (NZPA, 2008; Staff cutbacks confirmed at NZPA, 2008).

It seemed that BusinessDay wanted to see light between it and the rest of the Fairfax newspapers. *The Independent* disappeared from the Stuff website, becoming almost unique among the main printed media titles in not having its

own web presence, and Stuff did not link to BusinessDay (though Business Day did link to Stuff). Fairfax's strategy became even more bewildering when in November 2008 it announced that BusinessDay.co.nz would be merged into Stuff.co.nz (Fairfax Web Move, 2008), though that had not occurred by the end of the year.

The consolidation of Fairfax's business media continued in November by bundling a number of computer and business magazines in with the *Independent* as Fairfax Business Publishing following the group's acquisition of the magazines *Unlimited* and *actv8* from Julie Gill's Infego Communications. Gill was put in charge of Fairfax Business Publishing, which also included *PC World*, *Computerworld*, *Reseller News*, and *CIO* (Fairfax beefs up business unit, 2008).

The *Independent* went through seemingly continuous change during the year. It tried to reclaim ground from its dramatically reduced readership base through deals such as free subscriptions given away with subscriptions to other Fairfax papers (Stay ahead with all the business news with *The Press* and the *Independent*, 2008), and in June underwent another face lift and brought in new (though mainly familiar) contributors and commentators. Among them, in an ironic, even poignant twist, was Jenni McManus, former *Independent* co-owner and editor, who had left the paper soon after its sale, belying initially expressed confidence in its future. Those it sacked included one of New Zealand's most experienced economics journalists, freelancer Bob Edlin. It dropped *Financial Review* from its name, instead calling itself the oxymoronic '*The Independent—a Businessday Publication*' and adopted the internet-age strategy of emailing a daily bulletin of links to top Businessday news items to its readers. Though the restyled publication has replaced some of its former swathes of reprints from the *Australian Financial Review* with more self-sourced news and worthwhile analyses, it has yet to regain the edge of the independent *Independent*. At the end of the year, editor Nick Stride was replaced by Fiona Rotherham, a former senior reporter with the newspaper. She became managing editor of both it and *Unlimited*, pushing Stride down to deputy editor (New *Independent* editor, 2009).

In July, Fairfax announced that it was planning to create 'hubs' in Wellington and Christchurch to do the subediting of features, world and business pages for its newspapers (features in both centres, world news in Christchurch and business news in Wellington). Newspapers would 'retain their own individual looks and local emphasis', with local subediting and

layout of local news and sports pages. In reply to concerns from MPs Jim Anderton and Sue Bradford that the move would ‘undermine local communities’ ability to reflect local news, culture and people’ and ‘hurt our local communities, who rely on local news for their communities’ strength and wellbeing’, Fairfax executive editor, Paul Thompson said: ‘I can assure them that we’re still committed to really strong local newspapers in those regional towns and they’ll continue to have not only sub-editors in each of those towns but really strong news-gathering teams as well.’ The company was also ‘looking to have more generic non-news pages such as television and weather pages undertaken by providers for the whole group’ (MPs critical of newspaper plans, 2008; Newspapers revamp subediting, 2008).

Journalists had reason to worry too: in August Fairfax announced 160 redundancies (Media heavyweight to lay off 550 staff, 2008). It was partly a straight cost-cutting exercise—several columnists were dropped too; but in the middle of it, the company announced its newspapers’ market share in New Zealand had increased, and its earnings, excluding TradeMe, had risen 3.1 percent (though advertising fell later in the year). TradeMe had a whopping 39 percent rise in earnings (Vaughan & Weir, 2008).

Fairfax’s Sunday newspapers were also caught up in its drive to centralise. The *Sunday Star-Times* was probably the star of the Fairfax stable for investigative reporting, including business pages which more than most are about business rather than for business. When its editor Cate Brett (the only woman editor of a metropolitan newspaper) resigned in August 2008 to take up a position of senior policy and media adviser with the Law Commission (*Star-Times* editor accepts Law Commission appointment, 2008), Fairfax announced a ‘new editorial management structure’, with a ‘managing editor—Sundays’ overseeing both the *Sunday Star-Times* and the *Sunday News*. The new position would also ‘play a leading role leveraging the strength of the Fairfax group’s other titles in Auckland’. Fairfax executive editor Paul Thompson said: ‘We will vigorously maintain masthead differentiation because we have two newspapers that are very distinct in their market appeal’. He said the move was aimed at ‘many back-of-house areas where the Sunday papers can work more closely together’ (Changes at *Sunday Star-Times*, 2008). Mitchell Murphy, managing editor of Fairfax Digital (Queensland) was brought in to the new job, which includes editorship of the *Sunday Star-Times*. Murphy is a former editor-in-chief of Fairfax’s community newspapers in Melbourne and Sydney (Managing editor appointed, 2008).

Meanwhile APN News and Media's (ANM's) 2007 outsourcing of all of its subediting was running into trouble. In 2007 ANM's ultimate controlling owner, Tony O'Reilly had contracted out subediting to Australian company, Pagemasters, amid widespread concerns. Things did not go as well as Pagemasters had hoped. In July 2008 it was reported to be considering an agreement with ANM to get a guaranteed number of pages for subediting. Work had fallen due to the weakening economy. ANM was forced to give Pagemasters more work, risking further staff dismissals (Where are the pages? Pagemasters anyone?, 2008).

In September 2008, Fairfax bought the ambitious Dunedin 'glossy-cover tabloid weekly giveaway' *D-Scene*, launched only that year (Fairfax buys Dunedin community newspaper, 2008; Matthews, 2008). Fairfax also acquired community newspaper *Waiheke Marketplace* on Waiheke Island (Fairfax buys paper, 2008).

In Auckland, ANM's give-away newspapers were in trouble. In July 2008, ANM announced the nine editions of its weekly community newspaper *The Auckland* would no longer be distributed to all households, and instead would be inserted in Thursday editions of the *New Zealand Herald* and made available in 'high traffic locations', significantly cutting their circulations (Drinnan, 2008a; Pulling Auckland, 2008).

Internet

Advertising on the internet continued its mogul-attention-gripping rise, increasing by 54.1 percent year-on-year according to the Second Quarter 2008 survey of online advertising (Interactive Advertising Bureau & Pricewaterhouse Coopers, 2008).

The blurring between the internet and other publishing also continued with increasingly sophisticated use of the internet by conventional publishers. The use of YouTube in TVNZ's election debates has already been noted; most parties also used it for publicity (YouTube goes political, 2008).

Fairfax Media combined with the New Zealand Exchange (NZX) to redevelop NZX's web site www.nzx.com. NZX provides share market information and Fairfax provides news content (NZX, 2008). Fairfax was also working on grabbing some TV advertising by selling advertising around the videos that increasingly illustrate text-based stories online, often sourced from one of the TV channels, in Fairfax's case, from TVNZ (Lee, 2008).

In a step towards 'IP TV' or video on demand, in May 2008 TVNZ signed

deals with internet service provider Orcon and telecommunications giant Vodafone to provide high-speed access to its video-on-demand services, sidestepping the uncooperative Telecom and TelstraClear (Keown, 2008). Sky TV also announced a free trial service in May 2008 which enabled its subscribers to download programmes to a personal computer, despite warnings from Telecom that its broadband network was not capable of supporting such a service (Sky TV, 2008; Sky TV service, 2008).

TV3's media-savvy 'The Simon Eliot Show' went into a second season. For this animated children's quiz show, 'each week four contestants are selected and fitted out at home with a laptop, headphones, and camera to compete to win Simon's 'Stash of Coolness' prize pack.' The show has its own website www.simoneliot.tv (TV3, 2008).

Magazines

The magazine business continues to have very mixed fortunes which are changing the nature of the sector. As noted last year, audited reader purchases of magazines have stagnated since 2002, audited average net paid sales (ANP, which records individual paid sales, as opposed to bulk sales and give-aways) falling from 2,159,814 for the period ended 31 December 2002 to 1,968,254 in the period ended 30 June 2008—down 9.7 percent (Audit Bureau of Circulations, 2008a). The major magazine publishers in general have experienced stagnant or falling paid sales. In contrast, the move to highly polished publications in the multiple sales market continues. This includes bulk sales of both reader-purchased titles, and bulk-only publications. They are sold to purchasers such as major retailers or the Automobile Association who distribute copies free to their customers or members. These double the audited total number of magazines purchased per issue, and this is rising: from 3,909,771 in 2002, to 4,411,635 in the June 2008 period, an increase of 12.8 percent (though it is lower than the peak of 4,546,107 in June 2006). The most rapidly growing segment of the magazine market is that under direct control of major commercial clients, and where the readers don't make the decision to buy the publication.

In addition there are unaudited mass circulation glossies. Fairfax quotes the Nielsen National Readership Survey to show that its free *Sunday* glossy insert to the *Sunday Star-Times* had the fourth largest magazine readership in the country (514,000 in March 2008) (Fairfax, 2008); and in September 2008 it replicated the tactic with a glossy news magazine, *Your Weekend* enclosed

with weekend copies of its biggest dailies, the *Press*, *Dominion Post* and *Waikato Times*, giving an instant circulation of around 220,000 (Special start to weekend, 2008). They are all good for selling advertising, even if no-one actively chooses to buy them. The *Press* put its Saturday edition price up by 50 cents to cover the ‘free’ magazine.

ACP Media made a number of changes to its magazine holdings. It sold *NetGuide* magazine and website www.netguide.co.nz to Action Media in July 2008 (ACP Media to sell NetGuide magazine, 2008). In September it announced the closure of weekly *Auto Trader*, due to the pressure from online advertising of used cars (*Wheels fall off Auto Trader*, 2008). Its circulation had plummeted from 16,225 at the end of 2001 to 10,144 in mid 2006, when discretion overtook valour and it stopped getting circulation audits. APN’s New Zealand Magazines completed its acquisition of leading fashion magazines *Simply You* and *Simply You Living* (APN News and Media, 2008).

Locally owned award-winning Jones Publishing, announced in December 2008 that it was putting itself into voluntary administration (Jones Publishing in administration, 2008). In January 2009, the Image Centre, a pre-press, web design, and printing company, announced it was merging with Jones (Drinnan, 2008c; Image Centre, 2009). Jones attributed its failure to the ‘economic situation’, though its flagships *Dish* and *Top Gear NZ*, had stagnated or lost circulation for several years after initial success. Jones’ bread and butter came from bulk publications, which are perhaps more vulnerable to difficult economic times (Rosenberg, 2008a, p. 12).

Television

The battle between TVNZ’s TV1 and MediaWorks’ TV3 for 6pm news viewers to grab their attention for the evening continued relentlessly. While TV1’s falling share of the news audience has been widely highlighted, in fact it has consistently been ahead of TV3, by around 200,000 viewers each night, and in the six months to June 2008 it had an average nightly audience of 588,000 (up 50,800 over the same period in 2007) compared to TV3’s 353,600. TV3 claims leadership in the commercially attractive 18-49 age group but TV1 made headway in its older (25 to 54 year old) target market (*My one is bigger than your one ... Confusing battle of the box*, 2008; *One News v TV3*, 2008).

Campbell Live was winning the ratings battle in TV3’s target 18-49 demographic too: in the year to June 2008 it increased its ratings share

from 16 percent to 24.3 percent against TVOne's *Close Up* at 18.9 percent (Campbell v *Close Up*, 2008). But *Close Up* claimed an 11 percent increase in its demographic for the November year, though it lost 3.4 percent in TV3's target age group that month (My one is bigger than your one ... Confusing battle of the box, 2008).

Formulaic current affairs shows *60 Minutes* (TV3) and *Sunday* (TV1) remain in a lifestyle magazine-like rut on both channels, dominated by inconsequential imported content and few hard local investigations of significance—difficult in any case in a 15 minute segment. In-depth investigative reporting has largely been abandoned to the print media (where it is shaky too). TVNZ closed its widely quoted *Agenda* programme which had attracted senior politicians up to the Prime Minister.

TV advertising revenue fell by 4.4 percent in the second half of 2008 in the face of the accelerating recession, compared to a rise of 3.1 percent in the first half of the year—a net fall for the year (Vaughan, 2009).

NZOA's survey of the New Zealand content of the free-to-air television channels in 2007, released in May 2008, brought evidence of the commercialism of our television programmes. Over the six main national free-to-air channels, only 31.8 percent of their content (6am to midnight) was local, though at least that was an increase of 1.5 percent over 2006, and local content has been rising over the last decade, particularly since 2002. But NZOA compared this to Australia 'where commercial free to air channels are required to screen 55 percent of locally made programmes'. Prime was on an abysmal 12 percent; TV2 showed its highly commercial flavour with 18 percent—a proportion that has steadily fallen since 2002 (25 percent). TV3 had 24 percent, a significant rise from 19 percent in 2006 but not compared to 20-22 percent before that. C4 showed 23 percent. TVOne was still easily the best mass market channel with 57 percent, a rise since 2004, but lower than 2002 (60 percent). Māori Television led the pack with 80 percent—arguably the only public interest television broadcaster among them—though 40 percent of its content was repeats. Repeats have risen across the board, to 24 percent in 2007 compared with 20 percent in 2003. (New Zealand On Air, 2008)

In its fourth year, Māori Television had become a force to be reckoned with. Martin Gillman of Total Media described it as 'doing incredibly well' (Daniell, 2008) and *The Independent* reported that 'Māori Television is proving early critics wrong as audience numbers rise and advertising revenue is

predicted to double this financial year'. Two-thirds of its audience was non-Māori, and the audience had grown strongly, with a monthly average of 1.4 million individual viewers according to an AGB Nielsen survey in January 2008. In March 2008 it launched a Māori-language-only channel, Te Reo, on Freeview and Sky TV, with no advertising and no subtitles (Villari, 2008).

Prime was still cheap on news, with only one half hour bulletin a day, though now feeding it from Albany, Auckland, rather than Australia and with increased local content. Its parent, Sky TV, got into high definition (HD) with an announcement in June that it would spend \$22 million on HD broadcasts over the next two years. It introduced 'MySky' HDi set top boxes, aiming for 80,000 installed (compared to only 30,000 standard definition MySky boxes installed at the time). The new boxes were capable of hooking into IPTV services, which Sky expected to begin in 2009, and recording two shows at once while the viewers watched a third. Sky said it intended to broadcast over 100 sports events in the first year (Sky TV shows off hi-def plans, 2008; Stride, 2008).

Freeview made progress. TVNZ's TVNZ 7 launched at the end of March, and the 75 percent of the population with terrestrial access to Freeview could get it in high definition shortly after, if they had the right set top box. Its lack of advertisements, full hour of news, hour-length documentaries, and short locally produced documentaries gives it a strong public interest flavour, though it has a long way to go to build up its own content, and shows many repeats. The quality media analysis programme Media 7 with Russell Brown demonstrates what could be. It suffers from what appears to be a boycott of its programme listings by the newspapers. By August, Freeview had 11 channels on both its satellite and terrestrial services, another four via satellite only, and one via terrestrial only (Freeview, 2008). Almost 200,000 receivers (198,938) had been sold by the end of the year (Freeview approaches the 200,000 homes mark, 2009).

Radio

Commercial radio duopolists The Radio Network (TRN) and Radio Works (part of the Ironbridge-owned Mediaworks group) shared 88 percent of the audience in 2008. Only in Northland, Auckland, Waikato and Wellington do independents have more than 10 percent of the audience in aggregate. While TRN has the larger audience (47.4 percent), that is largely because of its dominance in by far the largest market, Auckland, where

Table 5: Commercial radio audience share

| | | Northland | Auckland | Waikato | Taranaki | Manawatu |
|-----------------------------|-----|-----------|-----------|---------|----------|----------|
| <i>Population potential</i> | | 102,600 | 1,031,200 | 212,700 | 87,900 | 99,500 |
| Newstalk ZB | TRN | 11.6% | 14.3% | 11.1% | 13.7% | 8.6% |
| The Rock FM | RW | 10.8% | 6.8% | 18.6% | 15.2% | 13.7% |
| Class Hits | TRN | 9.7% | 6.3% | 13.2% | 14.8% | 7.6% |
| Coast | TRN | 7.3% | 8.6% | — | 10.6% | 6.4% |
| ZM | TRN | 1.0% | 6.0% | 7.9% | 3.3% | 5.2% |
| The Edge | RW | 7.8% | 5.5% | 8.3% | 11.5% | 10.5% |
| The Breeze | RW | — | 5.3% | 7.8% | 1.2% | 8.3% |
| More FM | RW | 13.0% | 3.4% | 2.7% | 9.1% | 11.5% |
| Hauraki | TRN | 10.4% | 4.7% | 9.8% | 7.0% | 6.4% |
| Solid Gold | RW | — | 2.9% | 5.1% | 5.4% | 6.5% |
| Radio Live | RW | 3.9% | 2.9% | 2.1% | 1.6% | 5.5% |
| Radio Sport | TRN | 0.7% | 2.4% | 2.5% | 1.8% | 1.9% |
| Mai | RW | 6.8% | 5.3% | — | — | — |
| Flava | TRN | 1.8% | 3.4% | — | — | — |
| Easy Mix | TRN | — | 3.4% | — | — | — |
| Radio Dunedin | RW | — | — | — | — | — |
| Bsport | RW | 1.0% | 0.5% | 0.4% | 0.5% | 1.1% |
| Kiwi FM | RW | — | 0.1% | — | — | — |
| Hokonui Gold | TRN | — | — | — | — | — |
| Other | | 14.2% | 18.2% | 10.5% | 4.3% | 6.8% |
| Subtotals - TRN | | 42.5% | 49.1% | 44.5% | 51.2% | 36.1% |
| Subtotals - RW | | 43.3% | 32.7% | 45.0% | 44.5% | 57.1% |
| Total | | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |

Source: (Research International New Zealand Ltd, 2008). Table lists all those stations with 5 percent or more audience share in at least one region, and all network-owned stations. Values are share of commercial radio listening audience, aged 10+, Mon-Sun midnight-midnight, survey period 30 August to 10 Oct 2008. Radio New Zealand National & Radio New Zealand Concert are excluded from these results. Shaded cells indicate network with highest share. TRN= The Radio Network; RW=RadioWorks.

it has 49.1 percent compared to RadioWorks’ 32.7 percent. TRN has larger audience share in seven regions and RadioWorks in six (excluding Radio New Zealand’s stations) (Research International New Zealand Ltd, 2008). See Table 5 for details.

| Tauranga | Rotorua | Hawkes Bay | Wellington | Nelson | Christchurch | Dunedin | Southland | New Zealand |
|----------|---------|------------|------------|--------|--------------|---------|-----------|-------------|
| 129,500 | 44,300 | 104,300 | 310,100 | 55,500 | 360,000 | 99,900 | 65,900 | 2,703,400 |
| 12.7% | 6.4% | 12.6% | 16.7% | 11.9% | 12.9% | 10.6% | 6.9% | 13.2% |
| 12.0% | 13.2% | 14.3% | 6.9% | 17.8% | 14.3% | 14.4% | 14.7% | 10.8% |
| 12.7% | 13.9% | 9.8% | 7.4% | 11.8% | 5.9% | 11.3% | 9.3% | 8.3% |
| 14.0% | 6.5% | 7.7% | 4.3% | - | 6.2% | 5.7% | 12.5% | 7.0% |
| 8.0% | 4.9% | 4.9% | 15.6% | 3.1% | 6.0% | 3.7% | 5.7% | 6.8% |
| 6.0% | 8.8% | 7.8% | 3.5% | 11.9% | 7.8% | 10.0% | 8.4% | 6.8% |
| 3.2% | 4.4% | 3.3% | 13.4% | 4.1% | 9.4% | 3.4% | 2.2% | 6.4% |
| 6.4% | 4.8% | 4.6% | 5.2% | 11.3% | 11.3% | 8.0% | 8.5% | 6.1% |
| 5.3% | 7.5% | 6.3% | 5.5% | 10.7% | 3.5% | 2.6% | 8.8% | 5.7% |
| 2.3% | 3.9% | 5.1% | 1.8% | 6.9% | 5.9% | 4.8% | 3.8% | 3.7% |
| 5.2% | 3.8% | 3.0% | 1.9% | 4.1% | 5.0% | 3.7% | 4.9% | 3.3% |
| 1.5% | 1.4% | 1.8% | 4.0% | 3.2% | 3.5% | 4.2% | 1.7% | 2.6% |
| — | 2.0% | — | — | — | — | — | — | 2.3% |
| 2.3% | 9.3% | 10.4% | — | — | — | — | — | 2.0% |
| 2.1% | 3.4% | 2.7% | 0.4% | — | — | — | — | 1.6% |
| — | — | — | — | — | — | 13.0% | — | 0.5% |
| 0.7% | 0.2% | 0.4% | 0.4% | 0.2% | 0.3% | 0.3% | 0.4% | 0.5% |
| — | — | — | 0.9% | — | 0.4% | — | — | 0.2% |
| — | — | — | — | — | — | — | 6.8% | 0.2% |
| 5.6% | 5.6% | 5.3% | 12.1% | 3.0% | 7.6% | 4.3% | 5.4% | 12.0% |
| 58.6% | 53.3% | 56.2% | 53.9% | 40.7% | 38.0% | 38.1% | 51.7% | 47.4% |
| 35.8% | 41.1% | 38.5% | 34.0% | 56.3% | 54.4% | 57.6% | 42.9% | 40.6% |
| 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |

The duopolists thumped their desks when the outgoing government implemented a policy to ‘encourage diversity and competition in a market currently dominated by two large commercial networks’. Additional FM spectrum was made available to create new FM radio broadcasting licences which were ‘locally owned and operated’ (Methven, 2007, p. 3). Prior to an October auction of the frequencies, from which the two networks were excluded, they

lobbied intensively through the Radio Broadcasters Association against the rules (Drinnan, 2008b).

In February 2008, RadioWorks acquired Auckland-based Mai FM. Brent Impey, MediaWorks CEO, promised ‘nothing changes for Mai FM, except a greater level of investment and support for the brand’, while acknowledging ‘the very important role Mai FM plays in the fostering, promotion and development of Māori language and culture’ (MediaWorks, 2008). Mai FM had been substantially iwi owned: by Te Runanga o Ngati Whatua and a number of investors (Mediaworks grows radio, 2008).

Both major networks, TRN and RadioWorks, operate an increasingly centralised structure for their broadcasts. TRN’s structure was exposed for Christchurch listeners to Newstalk ZB in May 2008. The network announced that from the start of 2009 it would close the popular local Christchurch breakfast radio show hosted by John Dunne and Ken Ellis and replace them with Mike Hosking (who in turn was replacing Paul Holmes) in Auckland, creating an outcry among listeners (Silkstone, 2008). Though TRN acknowledged that the local show had been performing well, it said that ‘all other markets across the country shared the networked show and that the Christchurch shift would “complete the process”.’ That largely meant money: getting the demographics wanted by the advertisers (Matthews, 2009).

The commercial networks also came under criticism for paying lip-service to playing local music. Music Editor of the *Press* and trustee of the Christchurch Music Trust, Chart, Vicki Anderson, reflected on New Zealand Music Month, when radio stations are encouraged to play New Zealand music. ‘Commercial radio stations,’ she wrote, ‘have added the [local] artists to their playlists on extra rotation, ready to pat themselves on the back afterwards for “supporting local music”—something non-commercial stations do daily’. Commercial radio and TV still acted as gate-keepers even for NZOA-funded music videos and recordings. All the videos NZOA receives for consideration are sent to the music television programmers to tell it which songs they were most likely to play. Some established artists already with record company backing are ‘double dipping’: getting NZOA funding with an equal funding guarantee from the company (Anderson, 2008).

The media owners

APN News and Media

ANM’s ownership was in play at the end of 2008. In November, Independent

News and Media (INM) of Ireland, controlled by Tony O'Reilly, announced it wanted to sell its 39.1 percent holding in ANM. By late January 2009 ANM announced that the attempt had failed in an environment of rapidly falling advertising revenue and scarce credit for a purchaser (Janes, 2009). Fairfax had earlier ruled out buying it (Villari, 2009). Like INM, both Fairfax and News Corporation, another possible buyer, were feeling the effects of the recession. Private equity interests such as MediaWorks' owner Ironbridge were possibilities, though some have been even worse affected than the media companies by the financial crisis.

Fairfax

Fairfax ended the year on a downer with falling advertising revenue and uncomfortably high debt levels as a result of its expansion over recent years. It had laid off 550 staff in Australasia, including the 160 in New Zealand during the year.

Fairfax Australia's chief executive officer David Kirk had had to defend himself against trenchant criticism from former senior editors over the staff cuts. Melbourne *Age* editor from 1997 to 2004, Michael Gawenda, in a widely publicised lecture described the redundancies as 'chilling... it is a failure of imagination and commitment, a result of a lack of experience and knowledge and love of newspapers'. Fairfax 'was run by people who had no experience of the business, no knowledge of its history and role in the communities in which their newspapers operated and what's more, no great love of them'. (Gawenda, 2008). Eric Beecher, a former *Sydney Morning Herald* editor (1984-87), agreed (Beecher, 2008).

In December Kirk seemingly fell on his sword. He was replaced by his deputy Brian McCarthy who had come to the company from Rural Press when it was bought by Fairfax. He had 'a reputation as a cost-cruncher' (Fairfax Media names new chief, 2008; Steffens & BusinessDay, 2008).

Conclusion

Politics and the worldwide financial and economic crisis dominated 2008. The defeat of the Labour-led government in the election was well heralded in the polls, though evidence cited here raises the question as to what degree media commentators contributed to that outcome. The more open question was how would National win, and what would change when it did become government. Then the financial crisis appeared, as if from nowhere. On both

counts separately, and on the interaction between them, the news media were noticeably weak. Journalists failed to find out from National what it would do when it got into government, beyond its lightweight manifesto. In the absence of that evidence, analysts did little to paint a picture of what the new government might be like, the factional pressures within it, and the vested interests pressuring it from without. At the least, voters were entitled to a description of what the major parties would do in response to the financial and economic crisis. All they got were generalities and stop-gap policies. Either this was the triumph of the spin-doctors or the parties really had nothing to offer. The news media, with a few honourable exceptions, did little to at least make this clear—but preferably find out more about what the parties were likely to do in reality. Instead media followed sidetracks into personalities and scandal that were a side show to the real story. Even the coverage of the looming economic storm—mainly descriptive at that—was largely confined to the business pages.

Meanwhile, the media themselves are undergoing increasingly rapid change. The election coverage showed some innovation in the use of the digital alternatives that are increasingly attracting audience and readership away from the traditional masters of the media universe. But the corrosive mixture of that audience move and the rapid fall in economic activity is affecting the lifeblood of commercial media: advertising. For several years, New Zealand newspapers have been slowly but steadily losing their readership; as we move into 2009, well established newspapers around the world are failing due to the loss of revenue. Broadcast media are searching for ways to maintain their relevance. Debates among journalists and media managers on how to respond are furious and as yet inconclusive. The newly elected government has dropped the ball on the creation of an appropriate regulatory environment for the digital media, but that will not stop developments that are likely to leave us with a radically changed media landscape, long in the making but now catalysed by the economic crisis. The digital media are even more internationalised than the largely transnational-owned conventional media. We are very soon likely to discover what all this means for New Zealand news media, and the provision of news for New Zealanders.

Note

1. The article draws material from the electronic article by the author (Rosenberg, 2008a), available at http://canterbury.cyberplace.org.nz/community/CAFCA_publications/Miscellaneous/mediaown.pdf

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Dr Bill Rosenberg is author of a regularly updated paper News Media Ownership in New Zealand and he has been compiling information on the New Zealand news media for more than 25 years. He researches and writes on foreign investment, trade and New Zealand's economic relationship with the world with Christchurch-based Campaign Against Foreign Control of Aotearoa (CAFCA). At the time of writing he was working as deputy director of a university centre for teaching and learning, but now is policy director at the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions. His news media ownership paper was first published in 1996, with an edited compilation published in Pacific Journalism Review, v8, 2002. Dr Rosenberg also contributed the 2007 media review to PJR (v14, 2008). wj.rosenberg@gmail.com.