

# Byte by byte, techn

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NANTUCKET - If they had "lost the bird," they would have had to fly the unedited tapes to Boston.

But even if the "bird," or satellite, had not caught the signal, the television crew was certain it would make the 6 p.m. news with footage of Gov. Michael S. Dukakis at a press briefing at the start of his vacation last week.

A satellite truck, called a "KU" truck, beamed the image of Joe Day of WNEV, Boston's Channel 7, up to a satellite. The image was then "downloaded" at the studio and put on the air live.

Tapes of the press conference were edited and sent by satellite as well. Meanwhile, other crews, including Cable News Network, ABC, NBC and CBS, shipped their unedited tapes by commercial planes to Boston.

Print reporters wrote their stories on lap-top computers with word processing programs. Internal modems fed the words from their terminals, via telephone lines, into their newspapers' main computers, where their stories

were prepared for print.

Getting the news from the scene to the reader or viewer is not what it used to be.

And this year, technology has taken another step into presidential campaign coverage with, among other things, the growing use of cellular telephones.

Only slightly larger than a normal telephone handset, the portable telephones, which are charged overnight like an electric razor, put reporters and television producers in instant contact with their offices from virtually anywhere in the country.

A veteran political reporter who had long ago turned editor took a reporter aside recently and tried to give him a campaign trail tip.

"Large safety pins," the editor said.

"Safety pins?" asked the reporter.

"To pin your notebook to the bus or plane seat in front of you while you type," the editor said.

"But we all use mini-tape recorders, and we type exact quotes into our computers while listening through earphones," the reporter told the editor.

While the notebook has not yet gone the way of the quill pen, most reporters covering the presidential campaigns now use tapes with notes as a backup.

The Washington Post's David Hoffman, an early convert to cellular telephones, cited one recent incident to illustrate the value of this year's big campaign trail innovation.

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**LECHMERE**

# Technology aids reporters

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When covering Vice President George Bush during a recent trip in California, the pool reporter traveling on Bush's plane learned that President Ronald Reagan, after giving Bush a lukewarm endorsement, had just offered much sharper backing.

Reagan had called Bush on his plane by telephone. The pool reporter, using a cellular telephone, then told reporters in the press plane following Bush of the endorsement.

The problem was that the announcement came at a difficult time for East Coast newspapers because of the three-hour time difference between East and West coasts, and most East Coast newspapers were approaching their first-edition deadlines.

"You go right from the plane to the bus. It was a 40-minute drive into San Diego, which meant you were trapped on the bus. I used the cellular phone to call the office just before the evening news conference to tell them what happened," Hoffman said.

"We knew about the new endorsement before they did," Hoffman went on, "even though it took place in Washington, and we were able to get it while it was too late for a lot of others by the time they got to a phone," said Hoffman.

The portable telephones, which operate for about 45 minutes after an eight-hour charge, also have changed the way television producers work.

"They have changed the

by two men, one of whom knew Dukakis.

That became the focus of the day. It forced Dukakis to defend his administration at three different press conferences. An ABC producer, Patrick Sullivan, was able to alert his desk to the developments by cellular phone from the press bus.

Typically, when traveling with a campaign, reporters cover a speech at an event and sometimes a press conference afterward. They then board the bus or the plane for the next campaign stop, with a furious burst of writing in between.

"File time," usually about 15 or 20 minutes, comes at the end of the events.

That is when reporters are taken to a place where there are a lot of pay phones, usually an airport terminal. There, the reporter connects his laptop computer to an acoustic coupler, which looks like black earmuffs, and connects the telephone handset after dialing his newspaper's computer number.

Television producers, meanwhile, either hand sacks of tapes over to couriers or ship the tapes out on commercial flights.

"I've worked for a wire service and two newspapers, but I've never experienced deadlines like television," Sullivan said.

For the CNN crew, a 24-hour news service, the deadlines are constant.

"But life is easier with things like a 'KU' truck and cellular