LETTERS

CAJ raises more questions

It's high time that "computer-assisted journalism" made its way out of the hands of specialists and into general use. Your special report on Electronic Resources (Sept. 1993) will go a long way towards making that happen.

However, CAJ is increasingly raising questions in my mind—and problems with my work—questions without easy answers.

1. What is the proper attribution for a quotation that arises during an electronic mail exchange? "Said"? "Wrote"? "Replied in an electronic mail message"? The first two seem misleading. The last seems too awkward. "E-mailed"?

2. E-mail is great for eliminating telephone tag, which is why it has gained such popularity. However, E-mail is easily forged. To what extent should journalists attempt to verify E-mail messages?

3. Should publications pay for their reporters' E-mail accounts, or is this a "personal" expense? The question is complicated by the fact that most people who use E-mail use it extensively for both business and personal communications. Keeping track of what is personal and what is business is all but impossible.

4. Should newspapers and magazines publish the E-mail address of a story's author? How about of the editors? My magazine does; as a result, I spend a good four hours each week answering E-mail and "chatting" with readers.

5. Isn't it time to stop calling this stuff "computer-assisted journalism"? After all, we don't have "telephone-assisted journalism," "notebook-assisted journalism," and "library-assisted journalism."

If my experience is any indication, you'll find in the long run that CAJ will make you work harder, longer hours, and will blur the distinction between your job and your personal life.

Welcome to the future.

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