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Just a couple of weeks before our own very successful ASEG-PESA 2010 Conference was held in Sydney, the Walkley Media Conference 2010 took place, also in Sydney. One of the keynote speakers at that conference was John Nichols, a US journalist, blogger, media commentator, and author. His presentation, 'The Death and Life of American Journalism', was based on material from his latest book of the same name. I watched a video clip of this speech via the ABC's *Big Ideas* program and was struck by a couple of the statistics which Nichols highlighted (if you are interested, go to <http://www.abc.net.au/tv/bigideas/browse> and look under John Nichols).

First, in 1960 the ratio of journalists to public relations people in the USA was 1 to 1. In 1980 there were 1.2 public relations people for every journalist, and now, there are **four** public relations officers for every journalist. At the same time, a study of the source of the news content across a wide range of media

outlets in Baltimore, Maryland found that 96% of the new, breaking news stories were coming through 'old' media, i.e. TV, radio and newspapers – only 4% were coming through new internet-based media forums. However, the problem was the source of this content. The study found that 86% of stories came from information generated by government and corporations for media consumption (i.e. press releases and the like) whilst only 14% came from the traditional journalism model of a journalist sourcing and researching a story. These statistics could be replicated across cities in the USA. Nichols' point is that the quality and independence of American journalism has suffered badly and this has significant implications for effective democracy.

So, why did I think this might be of interest to *Preview* readers? A correspondent recently suggested to me that *Preview* should be very careful not to publish articles that might be construed as advertising. I was quick to reply that I spend a lot of time thinking about this very problem in relation to our magazine. In our industry, a lot of excellent research and technical progress occurs in private companies and is used immediately for the advantage of clients in a range of applications. If someone working for that company writes an article on their new instrument, technique or innovation for publication in *Preview*, I am fully aware that at least part of their motivation is to let the industry know what they are doing and possibly source some new clients from that exposure.

However, if I chose not to publish any articles from corporate sources, your exposure to new science in our industry would be much the poorer. Similarly, public relations officers from a range of organisations have added me to their email lists. Occasionally a piece of Industry News might evolve because a media release has piqued my interest and I feel it might be of general interest to *Preview* readers. At the recent ASEG-PESA 2010 conference, a very large Exhibition took place, and many representatives of these Exhibitors gave technical presentations to gain exposure for their particular technologies. Was the science any less valid or interesting because it came from a source with commercial interest in its development? I thought not – but you are of course welcome to disagree with me.

This is a fine line in our industry and I would welcome your feedback. Let me know if you think that the integrity of *Preview* is compromised by these corporate contributions, just as the quality of American journalism has declined due to the huge imbalance between independent journalists and corporate public relations personnel. Or is it a reality of our industry which we all know and understand? Fortunately, we read *Preview* knowing the source of the content, unlike the Baltimore citizen who is usually not informed of the difference between the news that has come from a powerful PR unit and the news generated by an independent investigation on the part of a local journalist.



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