In 2023, Voice Carry

Interview excerpts with
Jeff Jarvis, Victor Pickard, Mark Gottlieb, Victoria Amelina, and Yuliia Kozlovets

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KENNEALLY: Welcome to Copyright Clearance Center's podcast series. I'm Christopher Kenneally.

In the final weeks of 2023, Velocity of Content is looking back at the past twelve months of programs.

Citizen. Journalist. Influencer. War crimes investigator. Leading figures in the global community of creators go by many titles. We read their words, and we watch their videos, scrolling through our content feeds in search of meaning – and for meaningful connection.

Journalism professor and book author Jeff Jarvis recalls that early in his own writing and publishing career, he wrote on typewriters and saw his stories set in hot metal linotype. His latest book, *The Gutenberg Parenthesis*, places us outside the era of print and beyond the world that print created. As transmission of knowledge and creativity shifts off the page and onto the screen, should we celebrate or mourn?
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KENNEALLY: In your book, you describe how human communication before Gutenberg, and again, now in our own day, is of a different kind. We no longer are connected simply by words on a page, you say. We live in a digital network brimming with images and sounds.

JARVIS: The idea of the Gutenberg parenthesis comes from three academics at the University of Southern Denmark named Tom Pettitt, Lars Ole Sauerberg, and Marianne Børch, and it's their theory that I jump off here. They point out that before Gutenberg, our culture was very conversational. Information was passed around mouth to mouth. It was changed along the way. Come Gutenberg, things get set in stone, or at least in lead, and they are contained within a book. McLuhan said that the line – and this sentence is an example – became our organizing principle. So we enter into, in McLuhan's view and others' view, an age of text.

What changed that, I think, was the mechanization and industrialization of print come the 1800s – again, with the steam-powered press and with the linotype and with scale and the mass media

business model and the idea that you're going to sell an audience and its attention to advertisers. That took away, to my mind, the conversational nature of media. I think that we're just beginning to regain that now, although we're clearly out of practice as a society in holding a conversation.

KENNEALLY: To understand better the shift away from print and the dominance of text, you think it's important to understand the history of print and publishing. In that story, you highlight, Jeff Jarvis, the drive to win control of minds.

JARVIS: I think that the story of print is indeed the story of power and who held the power to speak and who didn't. One of my favorite anecdotes from the book is that it is said that the first call for censorship in print came in 1470, not very long after the Bible in 1454. A man named Nicolò Perotti, who was a translator in Italy, was much offended by a shoddy translation of Pliny. He wrote to the Pope and beseeched him, saying you must appoint a censor to monitor every form before it's printed. You need someone who is erudite and intelligent to do this difficult job.

As I thought about it, I realized he wasn't asking for censorship at all. What he was asking for was quality and the assurance of that. What he was foreseeing was the creation of the institutions of editing and publishing, which worked very well for a long time – for half a millennium. But now, they kind of aren't up to the task of dealing with the scale of speech today. And I celebrate that scale. There are so many people who were not included and not represented and not served in old mainstream mass media, which is run by people who look like me, old white men.

KENNEALLY: It's important to understand that contrast, isn't it, Jeff – that mass media abhors diversity, and in this new communication environment, everyone has a voice.

JARVIS: Whenever you see a means for more people to speak and be heard, obviously those who held control of those means before resented it. The Church controlled all communication. Along comes Luther – not so much making his impact with a nail on the door of the church, but more with the creak of the press that put his pamphlets and his views out to the world, and we had the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation.

And then today, what we see is again voices who were not heard before who now can be heard, and I wonder in some ways whether Black Lives Matter is our racial reformation and whether January 6th is the counter-reformation of the people who resent these voices now having the ability to be heard and to assemble and to act and to have power through these new mechanisms.

KENNEALLY: Jeff Jarvis, in The Gutenberg Parenthesis, you celebrate this noisy, maybe even messy, information environment. But some may feel nostalgia for the days of information curation. How can we learn to appreciate information superabundance?

JARVIS: It's a good question, Chris. I think that you and I grew up in a time of what I think is the myth of mass media – the Walter Cronkite myth, that Walter Cronkite would end his show saying, "and that's the way it is," and to many Americans, it wasn't the way it was. But certain people have a nostalgia for that Cronkite era, for that belief that we had a shared national viewpoint which we never did, for the mass media that was really – I despise the idea of the mass, because it is a way to not listen to people and not understand them as communities and individuals. I celebrate the death of the mass. So I think we have to move past those presumptions and nostalgias and appreciate the fact that we have all these voices now.

My fondest hope for both the internet and its companies and its entities, but also for good old media, is that we find the means to make strangers less strange. I think that's the most pressing job we have in our society today.

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KENNEALLY: In late March 2023, National Public Radio announced cancellation of several broadcast and podcast programs, as well as the layoffs of 10% of its national staff. The NPR cuts were the deepest the network has made since the Great Recession in 2008. The network's CEO blamed a budget deficit of $30 million. Executives said they were seeking to protect core services, and they pointed a finger at declines in corporate underwriting.

American news consumers are unfazed by hearing that programming on NPR and other nonprofit public media is made possible by for-profit businesses. But Victor Pickard, co-director of the Media, Inequality and Change Center at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania, wants to take a closer look.

PICKARD: I think these current problems at NPR, public media, and indeed our entire media system is facing at the moment gives us an opportunity to really think about what our media should be doing in a democratic society. As you noted, we've become somewhat desensitized. We've become desensitized to these constant cuts across media sectors, whether we're talking about the newspaper industry or cable television and now our public media. But we've also become desensitized to what you just mentioned in passing – this idea that our public media are being cut because they've lost advertising revenue and corporate underwriting. That really should give us pause. That's not what a non-commercial media system is supposed to be doing. It's not supposed to be so dependent on the market. And especially given these cuts in other places, we really should be looking to our public media to serve as a kind of safety net. So all of this is to say this is a moment for deep reflection, or at least it should be.

KENNEALLY: In the US, redlining is a way for banks and businesses to avoid doing business in certain communities by drawing a red line around neighborhoods and refusing to invest there or operate there. How does informational redlining work with news organizations?

PICKARD: Well, it works in many similar ways, in that quite predictably, we can assume it's going to underserve poor communities, communities of color. And this happens in several ways. One is that advertisers tend to seek out wealthy and often whiter audiences. So in many cases, these communities are not being well served by, for example, newspapers. Or internet services is another stark example, where you see digital redlining. But it also produces a kind of market censorship, we might call it, which is certain issues are not going to get as much coverage, because it does not attract eyeballs in the same way.

Another example where redlining sometimes takes place is when you have paywalls set up, as increasingly many news organizations do. Study after study shows the people who are likely to pay for their news online are, again, wealthier households. So we are disenfranchising entire communities and groups of people. For any democracy, this is not an optimal way to have our news set up.

KENNEALLY: Professor Pickard, you say that to protect journalism for the future, we need to shield it from the marketplace. Isn't that a tough argument to make in the United States, where free speech is equated with free enterprise?

PICKARD: It is a tough argument to make. That doesn't mean that we shouldn't be making these kinds of arguments. Even here in the US – that, you're right, tends to be very libertarian and market fundamentalist on these issues – I think increasingly we're seeing that with the utter implosion of local journalism – I think we're now up to about 60% of newsroom employees have lost their jobs since the early 2000s. This is a national crisis, and clearly the market is not addressing it. There's no commercial future for many forms of local journalism. So regardless of what our ideological comfort zones might be, I think we're going to have to look to public and nonprofit support for the journalism that democracy requires. It's just a question of how bad will things need to get first?

KENNEALLY: It seems unlikely that Congress would dramatically increase public funding for news media any time soon, Professor Pickard. Does that mean American democracy is doomed?

PICKARD: That's a great question, Chris. I don't think I would ever say that it's doomed simply because we're not funding our public media adequately. But certainly our research and other scholars have shown that there is this positive correlation between having strong public broadcasting systems and strong democracies. So I do think that's one of the things we must do in a broader pro-democracy, re-democratization movement is to ensure that we have a strong

public media system, a system that's committed to this universal service mission, to make sure that all members of society have access to a baseline level of news and information.

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KENNEALLY: TikTok challenges can range from the sublime to the ridiculous – and even the dangerous. There are challenges over art projects, school bathrooms, and sometimes fatally, boat jumping. Now, TikTok may have a challenge for publishers.

In May, TikTok's China-based parent company, ByteDance, sought a trademark for its own book publishing imprint, to be called 8th Note Press. The New York Times and others reported that the fledgling publisher is approaching self-published authors with offers for book deals. The advances aren't large, but the implications for the industry are enormous.

Mark Gottlieb, vice president and literary agent with Trident Media Group, described the bookselling power that TikTok already has, and why a publisher TikTok represents a digital-first challenge to traditional players.

GOTTLIEB: They have a very highly engaged, influential book community, along with the ability to make book recommendations go viral. They have a lot of authentic and relatable content and impulse buying through book hauls. They have direct links to their purchase pages. And they have a very broad user base that spans diverse demographics and interests. It's sort of all these factors – this amalgam of factors that allow TikTok to really effectively promote and sell their books, drive this kind of awareness, generate a lot of interest, and facilitate direct sales through its platform.

KENNEALLY: And we know it matters, we know it counts, because if anyone goes to a bookstore these days, there'll be a table that says, "As seen on BookTok." So it really is making a difference for sales.

GOTTLIEB: And a lot of publishers more and more are coming to rely on TikTok as a means for marketing and promoting books.

KENNEALLY: To be a startup in the publishing world, that's never easy. What advantages, Mark Gottlieb, do you think TikTok has coming to the publishing market?

GOTTLIEB: I think TikTok definitely brings many advantages to the publishing market to set it apart from other kinds of publishing startups. First, of course, TikTok has a massive reach, with millions and millions of users. They have a very diverse user base. They have a very big audience for promoting books, for reaching potential readers.

And then the platform – again, being driven by that algorithmic content discovery ensures that book recommendations can quickly gain traction and go viral. This exposes books to a very wide audience – these two factors of just the large user base and their algorithms. People will basically be fed more videos that they watch. So if they watch a video, I suppose, about a mystery crime thriller book, they're going to start receiving more video recommendations along those lines.

You combine that with TikTok's engaging and immersive format, and that allows TikTok to really captivate their users' attention and generate significant interest in specific titles. TikTok's interactive and community-driven nature fosters an engagement and a conversation around books, and then this in turn creates a very vibrant ecosystem for literary discussion. I think these advantages really stand to position TikTok as a unique and influential player in the publishing market, and this will further enable them to drive book sales and shape reading trends in their own distinct manner.

I think even while TikTok is primarily known for more so its entertainment-oriented content, it has definitely a growing community of business professionals and entrepreneurs who share their tips, their insights, their recommendations as it relates to the business world. TikTok's ability to present information in these short or bite-sized, engaging videos can make these kind of complex or otherwise difficult-to-understand business concepts a lot more accessible or easily digestible to a broader audience.

I think this shift towards the more personalized, interactive, and visually oriented book discovery and engagement really does have the power to reshape the way books are discovered, but also the way in which they're marketed and consumed in this new digital age.

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KENNEALLY: At the World Expression Forum in Lillehammer, Norway, the International Publishers Association presented a Prix Voltaire Special Award for murdered Ukrainian children's book author and poet, Volodymyr Vakulenko, who was abducted and murdered by Russian armed forces in March 2022, shortly after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Accepting the 2023 IPA Prix Voltaire Special Award on behalf of Volodymyr Vakulenko was the Ukrainian novelist Victoria Amelina, who received the Joseph Conrad Literary Award from the Polish Institute in Kyiv in 2021 and was a European Union Prize for Literature finalist in 2019.

In May, Victoria Amelina told me why she ventured to Ukaine's Kharkiv region to Kapitolivka, where Volodymyr Vakulenko lived with his family, and how discovered the author's journal buried in the family garden.

AMELINA: I came to the Kharkiv region in September 2022 as a war crimes researcher. This was the first war crimes research mission for the well known NGO which specializes in the war crimes research. The name of the NGO is Truth Hounds. It's a well established NGO that has been researching war crimes in Ukraine and other countries since 2015. I joined this NGO in 2022, because I thought that I might be useful in this way – researching war crimes committed during the full-scale invasion.

Once I heard that Izium region was liberated in September, first of all, we were all happy. And my second thought was immediately, of course, about Volodymyr Vakulenko. We weren't friends. I just met him once during the festival in Kramatorsk, Donetsk region. But I followed his tragedy, I'd say, because we all knew that he is missing from Kapitolivka. We all knew that he's abducted. So it was important to find out what exactly happened to him. And as soon as I heard that Truth Hounds are organizing the first war crimes mission to the Izium region, I volunteered to join them.

We went there on September 20th, 2022. I only was able to reach Kapitolivka on September 24th. Why it took us four days – basically, there were so many war crimes in the Izium region that we just couldn't proceed to Kapitolivka. Also, to me personally, it was very important. This was the primary goal of this research mission. But we couldn't stop talking to people in other towns and villages. And during this first war crimes research mission, we uncovered, for example, three torture chambers in Balakliia, which is quite close to Izium and Kapitolivka.

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But finally on September 24th, we came, and my goal was to talk to Volodymyr's parents, because unfortunately – and this is often the case – Volodymyr's parents are the main witnesses in this case. His father, Volodymyr, Sr., saw how his son was abducted on March 24th, and his mother also came to try and help to prevent the abduction, so she's also a witness. There were also preliminary searches in Volodymyr's house, and his parents are also witnesses of that.

It was a very emotional moment for me, and I have to admit that I forgot for a moment that I am a war crimes researcher, and I was a Ukrainian writer again. I talked to Volodymyr's father not as a human rights activist, but as his son's fellow writer. I started talking about his books and looking at the books that were left on the floor in Volodymyr's room. And at this very moment, Volodymyr's father remembered that there was this diary and that Volodymyr buried the diary in the garden before being abducted.

So after recording the testimony of Volodymyr's father, I also went with him to the garden, and we tried to look for the diary together. Eventually, I was able to find it. This moment was very surreal to me, especially because – I think you all know this by now – that Ukrainian culture was persecuted during centuries, basically, and many manuscripts by Ukrainian writers are still missing. For example, half of the novel of one of the most prominent Ukrainian writers, Mykola Khvylovy, is still missing, because all the copies were destroyed by the Soviet regime. There are many cases like that.

And I realized that perhaps Volodymyr Vakulenko is gone, and he hid his diary in the garden, and he wanted us to find this diary to hear what he had to say to the world during the occupation. It was very important to fulfill his will and find this diary. I brought this diary to Kharkiv Literary Museum. This museum is mainly dedicated to the so-called Executed Renaissance. So it preserves the manuscripts and books of the writers who had been executed by the Soviet regime in the 1930s. Unfortunately, right now, it also has a diary of a writer who was executed by the Russian regime in 2022, Volodymyr Vakulenko.

KENNEALLY: A month after our interview, and immediately following the International Book Arsenal Festival in Kyiv where she spoke about Vakulenko, Victoria Amelina was fatally injured in a Russian missile attack on a restaurant in Kramatorsk in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine. Yuliia Kozlovets, the book festival's coordinator, told me that the national community of Ukrainian authors and publishers has struggled to make sense of her death.

KENNEALLY: We interviewed Victoria for this program. You knew her. You knew her well. And I'm very sorry for your loss. How has the Ukrainian literary community responded to this latest tragedy?

KOZLOVETS: It's a big shock for all of us. Just two days after the festival – the festival which made all of us so happy, the festival where we were hugging one another, meeting our friends, having so much support from these meetings, from all of what happened in Mystetskyi Arsenal – just two days after, Victoria together with other guests of our festival, the Colombian authors and journalists from Colombia who had also an event in the Book Arsenal program – they went to Dnipro just after the festival. They went to Dnipro and to Kramatorsk from there, having a humanitarian mission and having the investigation also like journalists trying to visit those places and trying to talk to people to document their stories, to document the crimes of the war, to document what's going on there.

Victoria was doing this plenty of times. She was really very, very active in volunteering, in documenting the situation in Ukraine. In this air attack, the Colombian authors and Colombian

colleagues luckily survived. They were slightly wounded, but they were OK. But Victoria was very badly wounded and injured, and all of us had a last hope that doctors will make a miracle. But there were no miracles, and in a few days, she died.

On the next Monday after the festival, we had the farewell ceremony in Kyiv, and the next day in Lviv, where she was buried. This farewell ceremony in Kyiv – I was there, and it was so impressive – all the same people that was meeting in the yard of Mystetskyi Arsenal, but the reason for this meeting was absolutely awful and absolutely impossible to understand. It was like the next story going after the Book Arsenal.

So what to do – just wait when, I don't know, the miracles will happen? No, the miracles will not happen. We should live our lives now. We should do the festivals. We should think about all the risks. We should accept the risk, but we should do what we can now. If the best – what I can is doing the festival, I will keep doing the festival.

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KENNEALLY: Media – whether published by individuals or global corporations – has never been easier to make or been more ubiquitous. Technology sees to that. Yet we must not take for granted how critical these media activities are to the joy of celebrating our humanity and to the responsibility of sustaining our freedom.

That's all for now.

Our producer is Jeremy Brieske of Burst Marketing. You can listen to Velocity of Content on demand on YouTube as part of the Copyright Clearance Center channel and subscribe to the program wherever you go for podcasts.

I'm Christopher Kenneally. Thanks for joining me throughout the year on Velocity of Content from CCC. Best wishes for 2024!