



## Free Press Viewpoint

### Airline mergers a set up for trouble

Compounding its mistakes of the last few years, the Justice Department has allowed American Airlines to merge with US Airways into yet another giant company.

Perhaps it was inevitable, given the fact that Delta Air Lines had been allowed to swallow Northwest, followed by United gobbling up Continental. Now the U.S. has three mega-airlines, each one too big to be allowed to fail.

Business interests assure us these mergers are "in the public interest," creating stronger airlines more capable of serving the public.

Bull, we say. The public will wind up paying ever-higher ticket prices, and when one of these giants gets into trouble, who will be big enough to "save" it? Only Uncle Sammy, of course.

So the government, by allowing and encouraging these giant mergers, is setting us up for more expensive flights and for giant bailouts down the road – just like it has in so many industries, from autos to railroads to banking.

An enlightened antitrust policy would aim at preventing this kind of consolidation in any industry. It cannot be good for the economy or the health of businesses as a whole.

The airline industry has seen winners and losers since most of the old-line linear carriers failed to adapt to the "hub-and-spoke" world. Venerable names dropped out of the sky – Braniff, Trans World, Eastern Allegheny, Pan American, Western, the list seems endless.

Low-cost carriers rose in their place, led by Southwest, a company which always seems to be profitable despite its smaller size. Texas Air took over the old Continental and made a success of it for a time. Now, little US West has come out on top, taking over first US Air, then bankrupt American.

But the government does not seem to get the dangers of bigness. The same Justice Department that once spent years breaking up the original AT&T has since allowed one of the resulting "Baby Bells," Southwestern, or SBC, to gobble up two of its siblings and its one-time parent to become the new, ever-larger AT&T. Airlines swell with routes and planes. Banks are encouraged to "save" struggling brethren.

But what happens the next time the airline industry gets tough? The next time banks get out on a limb? And don't tell us these consolidations don't affect competition, even with the relatively minor concessions the government finally got out of American, US Air and other merger partners.

What next? Why not go back to a policy that makes sense, that keeps business competitive, allows for winners and losers, exit and entry? And protects us from price gouging and mega-failures? Where is Teddy Roosevelt when we really need him?

– Steve Haynes

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### Clean off the table? Shuffle the house

It was moving day at the Haynes house, and there was stuff everywhere.

I'd decided that I was tired of my dining-room table being used as a desk. For several years, Steve and I have been bringing our laptops home and working at the table.

First it was the computers, then the notes for stories and business, then the backup information for things, then just about any scrap of paper we didn't know what to do with. My beautiful antique oak table was covered, no wood showing. It was just a sea of paper with a few electronic devices floating along the top.

I wanted to be able to actually eat at the table now and then, but that had gotten to be impossible.

Then, our son called and asked for a bed for his spare room, when we came to fix him Thanksgiving dinner, so we stuffed a single bed into the back of the Explorer and drove it to Lawrence. This gave us the opening we needed to get started on our office project – the big move from the dining room table to a spare bedroom right off the kitchen.

First the double bed in that room had to be moved upstairs to replace the single that had departed us for Lawrence.

Then the monster roll-top desk in that upstairs bedroom had to be moved to the new home office – both because Steve needed his desk, and because it wouldn't fit in the small bedroom with a full-size bed. There was also



**Cynthia Haynes**

• Open Season

a tall file cabinet full of folders to go to the downstairs office.

A tiny roll-top writing desk, which had lost its home when we remodeled the kitchen a couple of years ago and had since been taking up space in the living room, was moved upstairs to replace its massive brother.

And since we were moving all this stuff around, we figured we might as well move the old television and oak entertainment center it lived in to the basement. We bought a large flat-screen television several years ago, and it wouldn't fit on the old entertainment center. We just shoved it, the record turntable and heavy television that were on it into the guest bedroom upstairs.

Now was the time for this piece of stored stuff to get moved to the basement, where a spare sofa was awaiting a television and entertainment center.

Steve and I figured we couldn't do this ourselves. We had to have help.

We got a friend and his son to come over,

and between the four of us, disassembled stuff and then huffed and puffed and lugged it up and then the stairs. It took a little over an hour to get it all done.

After our friends left, we looked around. The stuff was moved, but there was still a huge amount of cleanup. File drawers decorated three rooms, furniture was out of place from having been moved so that the big stuff could go through rooms. Bedding was everywhere, and boxes of stuff that had once resided in on the desks littered the floors. And of course, the dining room table still had its sea of papers.

Another couple of days have led us close to normalcy. The table is clear. The desks and bed are put back together, and most of the boxes are emptied. There are still file drawers everywhere, but we'll get there.

We'll get it done, and all the rooms will be neat – until the next time.

Well, there's always the closet in the new office. That's where I shoved everything that had been stored on the bed in there. But that's another story.

Cynthia Haynes, co-owner and chief financial officer of Nor'West Newspapers, writes this column weekly. Her pets include cats, toads and a praying mantis. Contact her at c.haynes@nwkansas.com

### Online media the new 'vast wasteland'

Generations ago, network producer Fred Friendly (later president of CBS) warned that television was becoming a "vast wasteland."

Then there were only three major network channels.

Now there are hundreds of television cable channels. And millions of Americans go online weekly to share their own amateur productions.

When veteran reporter Morley Safer received the Fred Friendly First Amendment Award in 2009, he took direct aim at online media: "The blogosphere is no alternative, crammed as it is with the ravings and manipulations of every nut with a keyboard. Good journalism is structured and structure means responsibility."

This applies to education as well. The contrast between what a student can find online, and what is in school textbooks, is dramatic. And schools are abandoning textbooks for online sources at a rapid pace. Quality is a big problem. I will give examples where I visited student teachers who used online materials.

In the first case, a middle school teacher in northeast Kansas downloaded a brief lesson on classification of animals from a web service for which the school district pays a subscription. Unfortunately, the lesson was laden with errors, confusing the Linnaean ranks (kingdom, phylum, etc.) with the names (taxa) assigned to each rank (Animalia, Chordata, etc.). I counted six factual errors in the 10-minute lesson. Later that day, I emailed the web-based service and they promptly replied to me that they "would look into it." The next day, they got back, indicating that they had confirmed that these were errors. They had pulled the lesson and would release it when corrected. Good.

In the second case just a few weeks later, another student teacher at a high school in



**John Richard Schrock**

• Education Frontlines

south central Kansas pulled up a lesson sponsored by a popular cable channel you would recognize. The 10-minute segment showed the natural selection of Darwin's finch where the beak grew bigger-and-bigger to become woodpecker-like (dead wrong). This online video continued to explain the peppered moth experiment by Kettlewell and showed four pictures – one was a butterfly and three were moths, none of which was a peppered moth. The producers of this educational "lesson" had no biology knowledge. I suspect they did little more than search their video archives for any butterfly or moth picture. I emailed four times and got robo-replies. They never changed their wrong online lesson.

Printed textbooks are carefully reviewed by experts in the field. But the vast majority of online materials are not reviewed at all. As Safer said, the web is full of ravings by "every nut with a keyboard."

Because print libraries have limited funds, they can't afford to buy low quality and trivial publications. Real libraries also classify science in the 500s and 600s, and place the nonsense and occult in the 100s. Online materials are neither rated for accuracy nor classified into science or fake.

Some time ago, the journal *Pediatrics* summarized a study where doctors used common search engines to research the term "childhood diarrhea." Almost 80 percent of the websites were wrong. Some provided recommenda-

tions that would have been fatal to infants if followed.

Researchers separated the university websites from the others, and "dot.edu" websites were just as likely to be wrong as "dot.com" or "dot.org." I have had my student teachers repeat similar checks and this situation has gotten worse, not better.

Simply, there is no magic method to detect accurate from bogus information on the web. If there was, we would all be using it.

That is what is so worrisome about the recent shift away from reviewed textbooks to using online materials. Even websites that provide teacher-prepared lessons are error-laden. A very few websites that channel through science organization "portals" offer anything near the quality of textbooks.

Fred Friendly died in 1998. Low quality television thrives. But cyberspace has provided an even greater "vast wasteland" he did not anticipate. And across Kansas, school administrators are competing to throw textbooks in the trash can and make this wasteland available to students in handheld devices.

John Richard Schrock, a professor of biology and department chair at a leading teacher's college, lives in Emporia. He emphasizes that his opinions are strictly his own.

### Where to write, call

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