

BY JOELLE RUBEN

SABEW has seen a lot of changes during the past 40 years.

The same can be said for The Business Journalist, the newsletter that has shared the organization's mission and accomplishments since its founding.

Throughout the years, TBJ has covered everything from the field's emerging trends, such as technology, to ethical questions raised by the interaction between reporters and Wall Street.

Readers have been paying attention. Financial commentator Lou Dobbs threatened to sue TBJ in the 1980s after reading an article that criticized him for an "apparent conflict of interest," said then-SABEW executive director Janine Latus Musick.

Musick, who admits she did not contact Dobbs for comment, said she ran the article after hearing that Dobbs had filmed a commercial for a financial services company. Her concern was amplified because Dobbs had used a set similar to the one on his Cable News Network program, she said.

"Since the SABEW ethics policy warns against even the appearance of conflict of interest, I ran a front page story on how his credibility was tarnished because no one could trust him to report — from the same style of set — on any financial services company without wondering who was lining his pockets," Musick said.

Despite the occasional controversy, SABEW has evoked positive response from TBJ readers, particularly for coverage of the annual Best in Business contest. Since 1995, the competition has recognized hundreds of journalists for their contributions to business reporting.

But long before SABEW officers sought to honor business reporters for their efforts, they had to work toward a more basic goal: the establishment of a respected organization with a consistent newsletter.

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TBJ at 40



*SABEW newsletter
keeps up with growing
membership*

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Former SABEW executive director James Gentry



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SABEW found a home in 1984 at the Missouri School of Journalism at the University of Missouri-Columbia

Then-executive director James Gentry, who recently retired as dean of journalism at the University of Kansas, became managing editor of TBJ that year. Gentry said staff members worked to expand the newsletter's content beyond information about upcoming meetings.

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During Gentry's seven-year tenure, SABEW grew from 124 members to more than 1,000, according to a TBJ article announcing his resignation from executive editor. The newsletter also evolved from a sporadic publication to a bimonthly one.

"TBJ was the mouthpiece of SABEW, and I think did a good job serving the membership and the profession," Gentry said.

The newsletter experienced another major change when designers switched from a broadsheet format to a tabloid-newsletter style, said Bill Barnhart, editor from 1991 to 1998.

Despite the new look and SABEW's increasing ranks, TBJ continued to rely mostly on volunteer contributors.

"As is always the case, my principal problem was getting writers to meet deadlines," Barnhart said.

He added that TBJ sprang to life under the leadership of Jonathan Lansner, a business

columnist at The Orange County Register.

Lansner, who served as editor from 2000 to 2003, said technology was a key component of his efforts to increase the newsletter's efficiency.

He and designer Shelly Hittner never met, communicating only by telephone and e-mail. The virtual correspondence encouraged the pair to create an electronic version of the newsletter that could be sent out for a fraction of the cost, he said.

Lansner also used technology to solicit the comments of fellow journalists for specific projects. After the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, he sent out an e-mail asking SABEW members to share their experiences. Within days, he had received dozens of responses ranging from firsthand accounts of the destruction to tips on covering the aftermath.

"You couldn't be that timely or interesting before because you wouldn't have had the time to make that many phone calls," Lansner said. "Now, boom, you sound out a blast e-mail to all members and boom, it comes back with 30 fast responses."

He added that as technology continues to improve, TBJ editors will be able to communicate even more with their readers, including those at smaller publications traditionally overlooked.

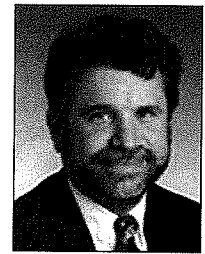
"Even through various editors and various ideas, it is a constant goal to represent what's going on in the organization through the newsletter," Lansner said. "Anything we can do to improve that is important."

Joelle Ruben recently graduated from the journalism college at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Memory banks

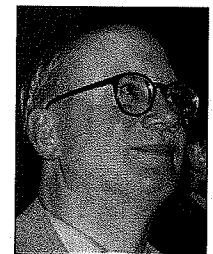
Have some old copies of TBJ cluttering your desk drawers? Send them to: Becky Bisbee, The Seattle Times, P.O. Box 70, Seattle, WA 98111.

PAST EDITORS OF THE BUSINESS JOURNALIST



JONATHAN LANSNER
Orange County Register (2000-2003)

LISA HOLTON
Freelance writer, Chicago (1999)



BILL BARNHART
Chicago Tribune (1991-98)

JAMES GENTRY
SABEW executive director (1984-91)

HERB DILL
Philadelphia Bulletin (1968-76)

GUY MUNGER
The (Raleigh) News and Observer (1965)