

Analysis of *The Wall Street Journal Online* and its Genre

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RE: **The Wall Street Journal Online**

Overview

This document will analyze the structure, presentation, and content of *The Wall Street Journal Online*. *The Wall Street Journal Online* is a website that contains content from the newspaper of the same name. It also has some extra features, mostly related to breaking news and online topics. The front page is available to everyone; however, the complete stories require a yearly subscription. The website claims to be “the largest paid subscription news site on the Web.”¹

Writers & Developers of *The Wall Street Journal Online*

The staff of *The Wall Street Journal Online* creates the website's design. The design of the website is separated from the creation of content for the website. The design staff is not visible to visitors of the site; there is no reference to the staff anywhere on the website aside from a link labeled “Contact Us.”

The same authors that write for the newspaper *The Wall Street Journal* write most of the content on the webpage, as evidenced by the bylines on the paper and online versions of *The Wall Street Journal*. Also, most of the stories that are on the website are from the newspaper. In fact, the articles from the newspaper each day are also available by themselves in a special section, as well as alongside website-only articles. A byline on each article's main page clearly identifies the authors of the stories. The front page does not list authors of each article.

The website uses a unique style to link it very firmly to the newspaper. At the top of the main news column is a heading labeled “What's News—” with the exact same adornment as the front page of the newspaper. Instead of photograph portraits, both the website and the newspaper use line drawings that look like engravings back from when newspapers used engraved plates for illustrations, such as in Figure 1. The main text of the website is in a serif font, another traditional influence. These features give a traditional, structured, and refined feel to a normally free and ephemeral genre.



Ed Nusbaum

Figure 1

Audiences and Users of *The Wall Street Journal Online*

The Wall Street Journal Online is targeted toward professionals in the financial industry, as well as managers and executives in all industries. The website contains news articles related to the financial markets. Featured prominently on the main page is a stock price tracker. Even advertisements are tailored to financial professionals (or at least people that think they want to be professionals). There are many advertisements for online stock trading services near the bottom of the page.

¹ <http://www.dj.com/FactSheets/WSJcomFactSheet.htm>

The Wall Street Journal Online also has features for executives in other industries. It highlights business events like mergers and acquisitions in diverse industries. Some other articles offer insight for executives to apply to their own businesses.

Despite the fact that it has content for different groups of people, the website has a single usability model for all users. It is intended to be read online, although each page can be also accessed as a printer-ready version. The print version of the newspaper provides for better offline viewing than the available printer-ready version.

The site provides easy access for searching. At the top of every page, there is both a field to search for words or phrases used in articles on the website, along with a box to enter company names or stock symbols. The lookup is useful for finding stock prices and trends, SEC filings, and analyst earnings estimates. It is also useful for finding all articles related to the company that have recently appeared on the website. Also, the website provides plenty of hyperlinks to information about companies whenever they are mentioned. This provides quick access to the research and company details that the investors and company executives that read *The Wall Street Journal Online* demand.

Format and Organization

The website has a structure with much breadth and depth. An overview of the structure is attached as the last page. The web pages follow a consistent format, varying slightly between different pages, but mostly adhering to a certain basic layout, illustrated in Figure 2. The consistent format adds to the stability and traditional feel of the website.

- The header at the top of the page has the logo for *The Wall Street Journal Online*, an article search form, and a quotes and research form. Below that, a bar lists other free sites that are owned by the same company, the time and date, and a link to log out. The header provides quick access to the information held on the website.
- Below this, three columns form the main body of the page.
 - A navigation bar on the left side of the screen allows easy access to all the different parts of the website. There are also some ads. This takes up about 10% of the width of the page. This navigation bar provides a detailed breakdown of all the categories of information available on the website. A user can quickly move to the category of information he wishes to view.
 - The main content body of the page has the main story, or if this is an index page, a listing of all the main stories that are related to the index page, each with a short sentence or two describing the story. On most pages, this is about 75% of the width of the page. The bulk of the content on the website is presented, front and center, for fast scanning and reading.
 - On the right side is related information to the content of the page. Brief information (with links to more) is available for each company mentioned in the article. More ads are here. This takes up about 15% of the width of the page. Summary and related information appears here. The user can quickly find more about the same topic by looking at this side of the webpage.

- More ads appear at the bottom of the page. Links that are necessary but not frequently used, such as “Contact Us,” are also found down here.

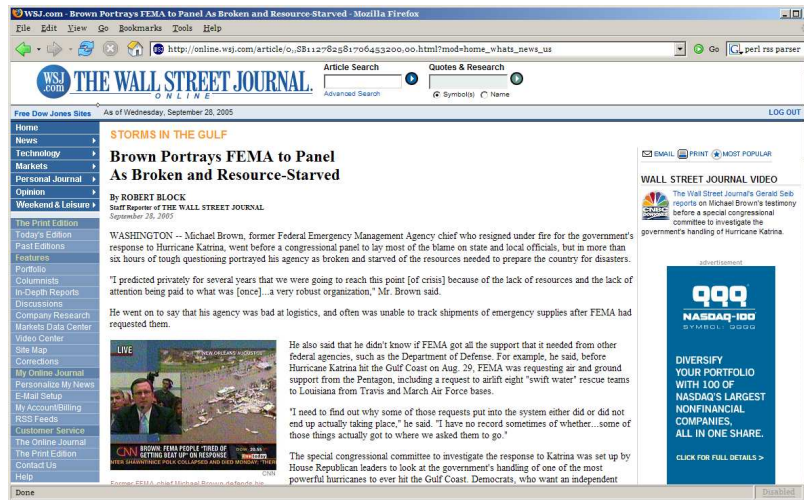


Figure 2: Story Page

On the main page, shown in Figure 3, the page structure is different. The middle and right columns have a different structure. Each is about 45% of the page’s width. The middle column lists the currently selected articles to be on the main page. The right column gives an overview of the newspaper, followed by an ad. Below this are several user-configurable modules. The user can rearrange and configure these modules. They include items such as “industry news,” “topics,” and “columns.” The user can configure each to show specific areas of interest. For example, the user can pick his favorite regular columns to appear in the “columns” section, and the title of the most recent article of each column with a link to the whole article will appear there. As the website serves different user groups with the same interface, these modules provide each user access to his favorite features.

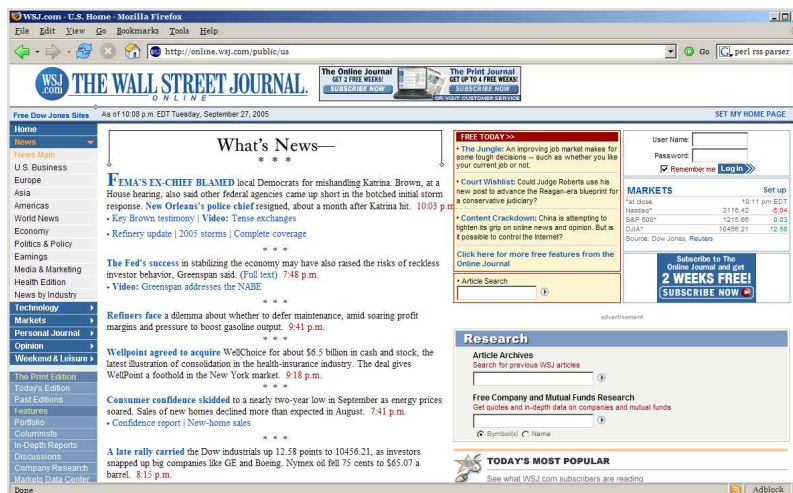


Figure 3: Main Page

This page structure serves a useful purpose. On the left side of each page is a static set of links to the most popular pages on the website. In the middle of the page is the article body. Finally, links to relevant information is available at the right side of each page for further exploration.

The middle column of the main page provides links to 20-25 different news items split up into five different categories. Each category has its own image header for clear delineation. The right column of the main page has about a half dozen of the user-configurable modules. These features allow users to browse quickly for the information they want, right from the main page.

Most of the other pages have a single story. The stories have hyperlinks linking to company profiles for each of the companies listed. The right column of an article page has related information. This generally includes related companies' stock prices and articles about similar topics. This design allows users to find specific information on a company mentioned in an article—it provides the news in context. For investors, this is very important. The news in context is what drives many investment decisions.

The website sticks primarily to text and images. There are no audio clips or video segments, as those are not in the print edition of the newspaper. Images are primarily constrained to engraving-style head-and-shoulders portraits of people depicted in the article and charts and graphs. Photographs and normal color illustrations also sometimes are included in the website. The charts and graphs are very useful for visualizing and finding trends in the data that the website presents. The lack of rich media is deliberate: it links the style of the website to the print newspaper that many professionals have come to trust over the years.

The website is very tightly packed. Most of the content bodies are filled with text with one or two small inline images. At the bottom of each page is a significant amount of white space. This may be a bug in the page's rendering, although it appears in Internet Explorer, Opera, and Mozilla Firefox. This packing of information is useful for the managers and financial professionals that use it. They want the relevant news, and they want it all in one place.

Level of Formality in *The Wall Street Journal Online*

The website strives to be very formal. The website's reading level is much higher than most other websites, including others in the same genre. Today, I come across words that I have never seen before on the website. Most new words that I encounter on other websites are either technical jargon or slang. The website strives to remain consistent with the print newspaper with the "engraving-style" portraits and serif font: newspaper is a much more formal medium than the World Wide Web, and *The Wall Street Journal*, as a financial newspaper, is more formal than most newspapers. Sentences are long, and paragraphs contain several sentences each. The vocabulary and writing style are tailored to the Ivy League-educated professionals that form a large part of the website's users.

Use of Visual Cues and Images in *The Wall Street Journal Online*

The site offers visual support to common user tasks. The search fields at the top of every page are right next to the title. The navigation bar at the left hand side of the page features pop-out menus that add quick access to deeper areas of the website. The main page takes small article summaries as chunks and pastes them together to form bigger chunks, these bigger chunks (with graphical headings) form the body of the front page.

The web server that hosts *The Wall Street Journal Online* dynamically generates the blocks on the right side of the page. On the main page, each user can configure which blocks he wants to see, and additionally what is in them. They are dynamically updated when new content is available. The blocks at the right hand side of article pages provide relevant information for each of the companies mentioned in an article. These allow for quick navigation between articles and other information on the website.

The website makes extensive use of tables to manage the placement of information. On the main page, there are 15 tables, with one table nested four deep. The main set of tables controls the three-column setup of the main page. Nested sub-tables are used for finer-grain control of smaller elements. This tight control of the visual presentation of information keeps the information on the website easy to find and read.

The site primarily relies on charts and graphs to visually display information. Each graph is represented to the computer as a GIF image, and typically contains a bold title, some caption information, the actual graph, and a source. Frequently, the graph has highlighted points with textual explanations of the most current occurrence or important events related to the article. The website also typically has engraving-style portraits for the most important person in its stories. The graphs help highlight trends in data that are difficult to pick out with just text.

Range of Variation in *The Wall Street Journal Online*

The Wall Street Journal Online is similar to other websites in the genre, but it does have defining characteristics. It tends to be more formal than all the other websites in its genre. It is most similar to *The New York Times On the Web* of the websites that I examined. However, *The Wall Street Journal Online* is more formal with its style of portraits and noticeable dearth of photographs.

The type of articles found on the website is different from the articles found on other similar websites. It primarily has articles that focus on business and economic news, rather than on general news. The editorial pages are also different: they are generally considered more conservative than most other websites in the genre, such as *The New York Times on the Web* and *washingtonpost.com*.

Forecasting my own Experience with the Genre

It is unlikely that I will end up working for a website that publishes in this genre. As an engineering student, I am not studying in depth the writing of the type of journalistic or literary content that would be written for this site. The most likely situation would involve me working on the backend of a webpage of this type, enabling the content to be dynamically updated and searched. My analysis of the content helps me to see some ways in which the page could be improved, namely in the standards-compliance of the document, as well as the bottom spacing layout bug.

Conclusion

The Wall Street Journal Online is a thoughtfully created website. It maintains strong ties to the newspaper that carries the same name in both content and style. It allows for personalization of content and keeps the user actively involved in the content by always providing related information and links to explore further.

