Sometimes we look at the big news and we try to figure out who should we trust what should we trust about issues like Anwar drilling or maybe this Weapons of Mass Destruction thing. How do we know what to trust, who to trust or something like that? And it has occurred to me personally that this is a big issue for our times because it affects our lives in a huge way. So my mind has drifted into this, into these areas where journalism and news are changing. And this is a big deal . . . .

Also as a matter of conscience, we do know that Craig's List is affecting the classified revenue that newspapers get and we're trying to understand this. And you might correct me in a number of ways. For example, I've read some reports which say the kind of classifieds we get are normally the ones that would never go to a newspaper. I don't know . . . I hear both sides of that.

I do tell people that my instincts tell me that the problem has more to do with loss of trust. People talk about it, people of multiple political stripes, they say that they know the whole Iraq thing. People know that something went on, apparently a scam, and yet people didn't cover that . . . .

A good example of citizen journalism is Ohmy News out of Korea. They were the folks who broke the best the story of apparently Connie Rice perjuring herself in front of the 911 Commission. I haven't seen peep out of that in the American press, but these people drilled down pretty hard and did a good job. There was even I think Congressman Waxman has recommended a congressional inquiry which hasn't gone anywhere. It wasn't reported . . . .

So I have a feeling this trust issues are a big thing. What's gonna' matter is things are evolving, we are seeing a for real, you choose your term, a transition to new means of delivering the news, to writing it, to new means of filtering and fact checking.
I don't really know what I'm talking about. I'm a full-time customer service rep. But I've enlisted the aide of people who, let's say, are noted in this area, and am talking to them and trying to get some help. Personally I want to do something to help the people who are getting seriously involved in that. That's me speaking personally. I can do some promotion, I might do a little funding in tiny amounts. And then I'll have to decide if I want to drag Craig's List into it . . . .

. . . It's incumbent on me to maybe help people [in journalism] who are doing the real heavy hitting . . . .

. . . The technology's changing. People are demanding more in terms of news, oh, some of the news that is normally not covered. People are also requesting that news be much better fact checked. Stuff like that. I don't know where it's going to happen, but I feel things are going to get a lot better for news producers, editors, that role will expand, and there will be editors who are news filters, aggregators, more. And we're going to see new kinds of newspapers and magazines delivered over the net. The publishers, though, the one's that are not starting to change, like today, may be screwed. I don't know.

QUESTION: Have you thought much about what aspect of “citizens journalism” interest you the most?

Remember, I acknowledge my ignorance and I'm also lazy. So what I'm doing is I'm getting other people to look at that kind of thing, because maybe we shouldn't get into it. Maybe we should find one or more of the places where people are doing that kind of thing and then say, hey, this is good. Maybe personally I'll say hey, here is a story I'm personally concerned with and FactCheck.org has taken a look at it and they think it is for real and let's proceed with that . . . fact check is really good because it is very clear they are non-partisan . . . .

QUESTION: The currency you seem to trade in is trust and not money.

. . . I don't know if I'm any of those things. Basically, I'm one very persistent nerd. I have I guess an obligation to the community I've built up. I'm going to keep the faith. I'm not an activist or anything like that. I just feel things should be better. And I don't want to be pious about any of that stuff. That's what I'm working on. It's fairly gratifying . . . I don't care too much about a lot of politics, but one of my roles is to fight scams, and I don't care whether they are economic or political scams.

QUESTION: On the one hand, deliberately or not, had you have helped to push journalism to this very crucial inflection point, because you're broken up our business model. So what do you hear when we make the comment about community journalism? What do you envision that being?

I'm not sure about what community journalism will be. I do think professional and amateur journalism, it's all going to blur together. Fact checking might become a job that lots of people do. I think editors and journalists are going to be paid directly by people in the community. If you find someone whose news you can rely on and trust and action on, you may wind up being paid for that. There's going to be some kind of new role that is going to merge editor and critic and fact checker filter. Because even the job of a theater critic is to filter out all that and tell you want you want to see. Same thing with the TV critic or a movie critic. I think this is all going to merge together. I think people are going to be paying sometimes for content. And I think we may end up, eventually, paying people for their magazines of sorts, of content that we might want to see and for that matter content that comes out at random that we don't know we want to see but it might be entertaining.

QUESTION: Isn’t it hard to discern trust online?
In terms of trust and all that, I haven't thought about that in depth except the idea of being continually engaged with people. I'd just say keep engaged with people and treat them like you want to be treated and in terms of your writing style, don't sound like you're a corporate business person. Just sound like you're a person . . . .

. . . . We're all pretty smart consumers. And the kids these day with their instant messaging and rock music, the kids are becoming even smarter and smarter about consuming media and they are probably not so much cynical as just experienced.

QUESTION: So, what I'm hearing is that somebody is going to have to start paying people to run fact-check programs. The media is broadening. Somebody is going to have to start pay for these people's salaries. Where is this going to come from? Are the consumers going to start paying more money? I'm not sure. My guess is that, yea, there will be a lot of people who will possibly be glad to pay more money for more reliable news as they perceive it. This will be mixed in a lot with entertainment and so on. I know I'd be willing to and whenever I talk about it, people are willing to do that. It is starting to work in Korea. Well just have to see how it goes otherwise. I may be very wrong. The thing is we do know some kind of change is occurring. The effect we are probably having in terms of classified revenue we're probably accelerating the change and again for me it is very important that people whose job this relies on, at least people hear about this a lot and try to figure out where this is trying to take you. So people can start to prepare now for the kind of change that is happening and this will be a big deal. I think I put up a link, in terms of stories today, I think the Annenberg [Center] is starting to put up information about how citizen journalists are starting to train themselves.

QUESTION: The notion of fact checkers seems so establishment. How do you see those things bubbling up?

I have a different opinion. Everyone I talk to from possibly the producer or consumer side, they want fact checking. We want something they can trust, which means someone has to go over the details. And that sounds good to me.

QUESTION: So that's the old model, sort of?

Maybe so. But, see, I don't care if it is old or new or whatever. I want something I can trust. Which means fact checking, usually someone else doing it.

QUESTION: Are you worried about people taking away your market share?

We do consider that. Efforts in the U.S. have failed because it was pretty clear they weren't dedicated to customer service and they were just trying to make a lot of money fast. In Europe, there are a number of sites in the native languages which are doing fine . . . .

QUESTION: So it is the trust that everybody is working in?

Trust. Well, that's pretty much how we run our lives. Our lives are pretty much who you know, which is another way of saying, who do you trust?

Applause.

-- END OF TALK ---