

Pharma's ur-blogger, back in print

A reporter for more than a quarter-century, Ed Silverman began covering the pharma industry for *The Star-Ledger* of New Jersey in 1995. He conceived Pharmedot for *The Star-Ledger* in 2006, and the blog launched the following year. The site quickly became a go-to destination for industry news, as well as a lively forum for discussion of industry issues. As of December 2007, Pharmedot got about 11,000 unique daily visitors, but it was shuttered in early January of this year after Silverman accepted a buyout from the *Ledger*. He moved on to become bureau chief at Elsevier Business Intelligence, a role he says is still evolving.

"For the moment, I function as a senior person working on stories of my own and working with others to offer insight or contacts," Silverman says.

Silverman began covering the pharma industry "by accident," as the *Star-Ledger* offered him the beat when he joined the paper. He's a traditional journalist at heart (with a master's degree in journalism from New York University), and his ability to adapt his reporting skills and sensibility in developing Pharmedot was certainly key to the site's success.

"Prior to Pharmedot, I wrote for a general audience that included industry people," Silverman says. "Pharmedot was a much more specialized, targeted site focused mostly on reaching people in the industry and people who work with the industry. But anybody could read it or comment. The audience was diverse as a result."

Silverman enjoys covering the pharma industry, which he calls "an interesting crossroads of healthcare, finance and public policy." He likes the dynamic nature of the industry, where-in "just about every issue has all sorts of ripple effects in different directions." While he doesn't miss the "grinding routine" of running Pharmedot, he does

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Ed Silverman

Bureau chief, Elsevier

2007-2008

Editor, Pharmedot

1995-2008

Business writer, *Star-Ledger* of New Jersey

1989-1995

Business writer, *New York Newsday*

miss the sense of urgency and audience interaction that comes with blogging.

Pharmedot's large following didn't surprise Silverman because he knew people inside and outside of the industry wanted to know more about pharma companies than just financial status and clinical trial results. "They want to know what companies are doing and how they're doing it," he says. "If you give them enough of that kind of information, they'll pay attention."

The Internet has clearly impacted the pharma industry, causing many companies to rethink the ways in which they communicate. By and large, pharma companies were responsive to Silverman at Pharmedot, though he says a few were "as closed-mouthed and unhelpful as ever." "The Internet has forced most companies to take the scrutiny more seriously," he explains. "They gradually became responsive because we developed an audience that cared about what was said or written about the industry. As long as the audience cared and paid attention, companies realized they were better off engaging than not. A couple of companies were willing to comment on the site itself, which was a big deal."

Industry coverage is clearly declining in newspapers and magazines, and Silverman thinks it's simply collateral damage from the unraveling of mainstream media rather than a question of demand for information. Though he says he doesn't have a very good crystal ball, he sees most industry coverage coming from newswires, specialty media and websites.

"I don't think we have a firm answer on what the coverage is going to look like in 10 years," he adds. "I don't know that we'll see something neatly replace big city dailies. Coverage will be more fragmented.

Certain stories may never be told as a result because the media is looking at the industry very narrowly. What media will be looking at it from the consumer point of view? I don't know the answer." — Tanya Lewis



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