Computers in the High School Newsroom is an article explaining the benefits a computer has brought to Cocoa Beach High’s newsmagazine production. It relates the school’s decision to purchase a computer, the fun of computerizing an operation that had barely crept out of the manual-typewriter phase, and the undying loyalty the staff has developed toward their newest staff member—the computer.

It happened one day at a hastily-called newsmagazine staff meeting. Although a hectic press-deadline was looming over the high school publication group, if they were going to go through with it, now was the time. They were about to make a decision that would shake the high school newsmagazine staff out of its familiar journalistic routine forever.

"Well, staff, we’ve talked about it long enough," the advisor opened the meeting, and added, "I think it's time to jump in, don't you?"

"I don't know. Tell us again why we should do it. It sounds super, but..." the editor's voice trailed off, revealing her suspicion about the entire matter. The rest of the staff moved closer to her in silent support.

"I have the information right here!" the advisor answered confidently, whipping out a legal-sized pad and proceeding to read from it.

Her list began with word-processing and went on to include every area of the publication. By the time she had finished her explanation, the decision was made—hesitant but excited, the staff decided to purchase a computer and be ready to use it by the fall term.

With this determination they made their leap into the promised land of high technology.

Their decision to go with a computer rather than a simple word-processor was based on the desire to have it all—word processing, bookkeeping, distribution, and the capability to individualize programs. They selected a system that included dual disk drives, a printer, and software (programs) that would answer their needs.

When the computer arrived, initial shock set in. The long-awaited dream was a reality, hooked up and winking provocatively. It was obvious that somebody had to figure out how to turn a blank monitor into the magic screen they had expected. First the advisor, then the five students on the editorial staff, learned the word-processing program. They found that although the program had many options, relatively few were needed to get them started, while the other options could be learned as new demands arose. Knowing that they didn't have to be programmers, but merely intelligent human beings who refused to let technology intimidate them, was a relief. However, it became apparent very soon that it helped if the human beings could type. While a typing deficiency was not fatal, it proved to be a definite handicap, but those students who were handicapped developed a remarkable motivation for increased typing skills when they used the computer to the tune of twenty-four staff members snarling, "Hurry up! I'm on deadline!"

Once the editorial staff was familiar with the program, they began training other staff members, and it wasn’t long before the room was filled with jargon uttered by seasoned computer users. The computer had become an integral part of the staff, fun-loving and capricious at times, but most often an accurate, rapid, and tireless worker.

Naturally there were some misgivings which had to be overcome before the new system was declared a success.
Sports Editor Erik Arneson disclosed one of the suspicions that many computer novices feel, "Was the copy really saved? Will it ever reappear if I take it off the screen?" This anxiety was justified, according to staffer Cherie Dickson, "You have to know what you're doing, that's for sure," Cherie stated emphatically. "I entered a whole story, and somebody else entered two stories right after I did. We never saw them again...they just disappeared." Disappearing stories taught the unforgettable lesson that the computer would do whatever it was told, but if there was no command, there was no performance.

As their proficiency increased, the staff members realized the beauty of a system that allowed them to type their copy one, only once. No more typing, correcting, retyping ad infinitum, or at least until deadline. B.C. (before computer), the material had been typed so many times that the final copy could be done from memory. After the copy was entered and saved on a disk, it was available for recall to be edited, proofread and printed. Now the editors could reorganize articles by moving words, paragraphs, even large sections of copy, and watch the computer do all the retyping. Editor-in-chief for 1982-83, Tanya Whiting, is a witness to the value of these capabilities. She declared, "Using the computer saved a lot of time previously wasted doing editing and proofing manually. Spelling and punctuation errors were easy to fix, and the staff didn't cringe when errors were found—other than from embarrassment. They were saved from another embarrassment when they learned how to send awful material to oblivion with one command: KILL."

Entering and editing the copy brought the staff to the next step in their production routine, that of layout. Previously, margins had to be determined before the first typing so that justification could be done. Typing slashes at the end of every line of rough copy to justify margins, and adding spaces in final copy were nobody's favorite activity, so there was no sorrow when this method became outdated because of the computer. Editors could change their minds about column widths without having typists stage a mutiny. The computer was willing to produce the same copy in any width at any time. All they had to do was ask. Arneson recalls the luxury of being able to work with innovative layouts because of the flexibility of margins. Layout time became a lot easier and more relaxed, according to Erik.

Having one computer and twenty-five students clamoring for access did present a challenge, but with cooperation and proficiency the difficulty was minimized. The writers did not do their original composing on the computer; they used the old-fashioned pencil and paper for writing their copy. After editing it for gross errors, they were ready to enter it, refining as they typed. When the material was saved, they printed it out a hard copy so they could use it away from the computer, giving someone else a chance to enter, save, and print. Using copyreading marks, corrections were noted on the hard copy, then put into the computer. This gave the staff the flexibility of working either away from the computer or with the monitor, depending on the time factor. Scott Foster, Editor-in-chief for 1983-84, expressed his feelings about the computer, "Using it for copyreading saved my life. Instead of running around the room trying to find all the copy, I knew it was on the disks beside the computer, ready to be recalled. The disk system was a great advantage. At final layout time the copy was called up onto the screen for one last editing, then it was P for printing, and the computer presented the editors with clean, camera-ready material, neatly printed (provided the editor has given all the right commands) in correct column width."

The editors and staff members could take a break as soon as they had pasted up their layout, but the computer was ready to pick up the next chore which was distribution. Using different software, the circulation manager had entered both in-school and mail-out subscriptions earlier in the year at sales time. Now the information was called up, arranged according to distribution needs, and lists and labels were printed. The circulation manager was saved from duplicate work, and there were no more multiple, hard-to-read carbon copy labels.

This same system enabled the business manager to have a record for the books. He used the same lists which had been entered with all the bookkeeping information included. One goal this year is to computerize all business functions.

Goals for this year—the staff has learned the beguiling ways of high technology so well they are considering new horizons for expansion. They have found their own answers to the question put to the advisor a year earlier, asking "Why buy a computer?" Whiting summed up her answer by writing, "Using the computer has been an invaluable experience..." Editor-in-chief for 1983-84, Scott Foster, echoed this enthusiastic support by saying, "We're really lucky to have had hands-on experience with computers because they are the future. For us to get that kind of experience in high school is phenomenal. Now if we only could afford a second computer..." From all the evidence, it appears that the staff made a wise decision at that meeting a year ago.

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