Methods

I gained access to *The Times* through a confluence of lucky events. First and foremost, Martin Nisenholtz had been a student of my advisor, Larry Gross, at the University of Pennsylvania, and he was able to issue a command from the top to let me in to the newsroom. Second, Kevin McKenna, one of the heads of *CyberTimes*, who was now a deputy business editor, remembered Pablo Boczkowski’s 1998 fieldwork and understood what I was trying to accomplish. Finally, I was able to meet *Business Day* editor Larry Ingrassia at a Society of American Business Editors and Writers get-together at Columbia University to explain my study. His college roommate at Yale had done a newsroom ethnography for his dissertation. My own project began as a doctoral dissertation for the University of Southern California’s Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism.

In order to secure access to the newspaper, I worked with *New York Times* lawyers to hammer out an agreement that would keep the newsroom confident that I would not leak any information about breaking news or new developments in *The Times*’ business strategy. As a result, I agreed both to focus my research away from delicate subjects like sourcing and to avoid inquiry about *The Times*’ business model. In subsequent conversations, I agreed to devote most of my attention to the business desk (instead of observing, say, daily news meetings on the national desk, as well). To insure that I had not revealed any information that could jeopardize source relations, and to help check for factual accuracy, I gave McKenna the right to review my dissertation.
manuscript. Others were given the opportunity to review the manuscript if they were profiled extensively (such as Andrew Martin, Nick Bilton, and Graham Bowley). None of the field anecdotes have changed since this time, though the framing of the argument has. This means that *The Times* was given the right to review the initial dissertation for compliance to our original agreement and for any factual errors they saw in this draft, but I did not make any changes to the argument in the initial dissertation. However, this version has substantially revised the argument for the work.

To comply with the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I was able to secure an agreement with USC that required a verbal agreement, followed up by an information sheet. The IRB said that I was able to use names with consent. My purpose in the newsroom was explained with an introductory email to the entire Business Day staff and a clear note that no one had to participate unless they wanted to. Only one journalist, Louise Story, declined to participate, and I did not include any direct quotes or specific observations of her from my time there—and she was comfortable with this arrangement (and requested to be named as not participating). While I was unable to blast the entire business staff with the information sheet all at once, I provided information sheets to those I observed and interviewed. In some cases, it was simply not possible to provide every single person with the IRB information sheet—such as top editors in Page One or people whom I met casually in the newsroom. Nonetheless, it was well communicated to the newsroom staff that I was a visitor working according to traditional journalism rules (on-the-record, off-the-record, on background) who would use the information first for a dissertation and then for other academic publishing, including this book or additional articles. I was able to confirm with USC that my work met the standards they expected from this kind of IRB research and have sent this confirmation to the publisher.

To protect my research subjects in this difficult time for journalism, I was very careful to explain the purposes of the project and its outcomes to the best of my ability to each and every journalist with whom I worked closely. Journalists agreed to be named, unless they decided to go “on background” for specific comments. When journal-
ists said negative things about the newspaper, I omitted their names unless they specifically requested otherwise. I also scrubbed the dates from the book, as either emails, news events, or assorted markers, and journalists could be identified as speaking to me by those dates. However, upon request, I can provide field dates to academics who request this information.

As for the actual process of information gathering and information processing, my research began the second week in January 2010. I entered the newsroom with the intention to spend three days a week at The Times, but after a week or two, I quickly began going nearly every day. After this short period of observing meetings and introducing myself to both the business desk and the newsroom more generally, I began soliciting journalists for what I called “shadowing.” This meant that I would spend a day with a specific journalist, from the time they came into the office generally until the time they left or they asked me to give them the space to focus on a task that generally would not yield more information for me (e.g., writing the final draft of an article). These journalists let me watch them do everything—I was privy to their emails, their IM conversations, their phone conversations, and so on. One might wonder how I could understand what kind of phone conversations they were having, but all text-based journalists I observed now take their notes on Microsoft Word, so I was able to see the other side of the conversation. I was also able to observe interoffice communication through IM. I am thankful for their generosity. I benefited from working with a subject population that understood the need to gather as much information as possible and understood how this information could become public knowledge.

Ultimately, I shadowed thirty-six people throughout my five months in the newsroom, from text-focused “traditional” reporters on the business desk, to home page editors, to Web producers. After two months in the newsroom, I began conducting interviews with a protocol I had developed. Ultimately, I interviewed eighty-one people, from Bill Keller, executive editor, to the youngest journalist on the business desk, Javier Hernandez. These interviews were not limited to the business desk but included discussions with people all across the newsroom hierarchy, focusing particularly on those thinking about digital strategy, investigations, and changes in the newsroom.
In between shadowing and interviewing, I generally attended three newsroom meetings a day—the Business Day morning meeting and the two Business Day afternoon meetings. I also attended Web “turnover meetings” and morning Web meetings on occasion, though as I detail, they were quite short and had little impact on the ultimate decision making of the home page editor. I also attended approximately one month’s worth of Page One meetings across my time in the newsroom.

I had an excellent “campout” spot in the newsroom to observe and overhear conversation. My little “desk” was a small, round, one-person table located in the middle of the Business Day newsroom, quite close to the pod that included all the top editors and directly next to the financial reporters. As such, I could listen to editors and reporters talking to each other about stories. One critique often harvested about newsroom ethnography is that ethnographers never leave the newsroom to watch people report. In this case, most business reporters did work from their desks in New York, save for in-person source meetings. The event-driven news could be observed from the newsroom, as I detail. Since I often couldn’t watch source meetings, I did, in fact, miss these quiet lunches. However, I was often invited to sit in on more casual meetings, and The Times business staff regularly brought in CEOs and government officials to provide off-the-record commentary about their specialties. I was welcome to attend these meetings. As you saw in chapter 2, I was also invited to sit in on conference calls and the like on occasion.

In addition, I visited the International Herald Tribune (IHT) in Paris for a week, and after my research at The Times, I was able to visit the IHT in Asia. This material does not appear in this text, but it did yield rich information about the twenty-four-hour business news cycle, print and online convergence, interactivity without resources, and other valuable information.

Traditional ethnographic methods guided my research. Journalists were not at all surprised to see me with a notebook in hand, jotting down as much conversation as possible. I had small field notebooks on hand with me, and thanks to my training as a journalist, I was able to capture direct quotes verbatim throughout the course of the day. Each day would yield approximately ten pages’ worth of single-spaced field notes, replete with full conversations, which I, in turn, typed and tran-
scribed onto Google documents. For each interview, I sat with my laptop and directly transcribed the conversations onto Google Documents.

Each weekend, I took the plethora of field notes and started to code the notes using the methods first outlined by Glaser and Strauss. I relied on the constant comparative method to go through my notes. I first looked for key codes, and then I looked more broadly for concepts and then finally for themes, which ultimately guided my analysis. In the initial version of this manuscript, there was more detail about business news decision making, but in this manuscript, the focus ultimately came to be on the themes most closely related to print and online news in the digital age. In the first weeks, I found it difficult to find recurring codes, but then I quickly was able to see common threads throughout the course of each day as I became more immersed in the newsroom.

I relied on a backdrop of theory about news ethnography and the larger culture of the Web as I began my research. I had read contemporary and historic ethnographies before beginning my work, and I reread them as I began my analysis. I also immersed myself in literature about the culture of the Web in 2010 as I began to consider the role of the information technology world at large. In this way, I used the grounded theory method to move from my data to a larger work that drew on extant theory to produce this book’s text.