

Dan Brown: Journalist, blogger, teacher



Dan Brown, proving daily that "A little snippet of conversation can take on a life of its own."
Photography by Matt Neeb.

In today's era of instant messaging, Dan Brown is the epitome of the modern communicator.

Brown is the on-line editor of *The London Free Press* website *lfpress.com*. In this capacity he keeps the site up-to-date with late breaking news. While there will always be an audience for the print product, Brown says that "more and more people want their news today." He says that *The London Free Press* is one brand that serves different audiences. One group likes to have the hard copy in their hands; the other prefers to go to the computer screen. "We have upped the speed, but we don't sacrifice things in terms of quality."

Brown's background in journalism spans 16 years. A native of the London area, he graduated from the University of Western Ontario with a BA in English and earned an MA in English from the University of Guelph. As he says, "It took awhile to find out what I really wanted to do." After

ultimately receiving a BAA in Journalism from Ryerson University, he freelanced, worked at the *The Globe and Mail*, papers in New Brunswick, *National Post* and the CBC, where he made his on-line foray with *cbc.ca*.

Brown's interest lies in the arts, specifically, pop culture. He is able to indulge and share his passion in a number of ways. On his blog, Brown discusses a variety of subjects. For the uninitiated, a blog is a frequently updated on-line journal that offers readers the opportunity to reply and post their own opinions. Brown says that blogging is not journalism. "For me blogging is making small talk at a party. A little snippet of conversation can take on a life of its own."

Intended as a forum to discuss pop culture, Brown's blog covers topics on everything from the U.S. election, Britney Spears and a recipe for pink lemonade pie. Brown loves the interactivity. He tries to respond to all of the comments sent in and has garnered an avid readership. One day recently he received 60 comments in response to his posts. He is very grateful for the respectful level of the conversation on his blog and has let his readers know that. While Brown says people have been offering their opinions forever, the blog is specific to the web, with its own vocabulary and conventions.

Megan Zinn is a loyal follower of Brown's blog. Her generation has grown up with the internet and this type of communication is second nature to her. With an education in corporate communications and public relations, Zinn enjoys finding ways to use the new media and blogging is a big part of that. While she visits other blogs, Zinn says Brown's is the one she is the most loyal to. "Dan is very thought provoking as a writer and in person." She enjoys the subject of pop culture and says, "Going into his blog and seeing the topics makes me think in a different way and I end up learning what he

has to say and what other bloggers have to say."

Zinn sees the web as a natural progression in information gathering and an advantage to the traditional newspaper. "It really engages a new group of people in *The Free Press*. People who may not subscribe to the paper go onto the website and that increases readership."

Brown's passion for the arts and his desire to share ideas extends beyond cyberspace. As a part time instructor at the Faculty of Information and Media Studies at Western, Brown teaches arts and entertainment journalism, a course he designed himself. In this class, the students cover a number of areas such as profiles, reviews and columns. The students are encouraged to write about things that interest them, from the Academy Awards to video games. "Students have their own interests. Give them the flexibility to pursue things they love and they are going to be more motivated and will get more out of the assignment."

Daniela Simunac, education and night reporter at *The Free Press*, was a student of Brown's in 2006. She appreciated that Brown shared his vision of arts as a legitimate form of journalism. She calls his class "a breath of fresh air, everything else was heavy on the political or business side." Simunac found the assignments fun, but also challenging, allowing her the opportunity to stretch her abilities. Because Brown used his own examples and articles, he provided insight into what was going on in his mind during their creation.

As a co-worker, Simunac sums up what makes Brown so popular on the web and in person. When she began her job in September, she says, "Dan welcomed me aboard. It's nice to have someone like that around. He is a genuinely nice guy."

Maridon Duncanson is a London freelance writer with a passion for art, theatre and music. She also likes cats.

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