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A Website That Saves Today's Headlines for Tomorrow

This is the VOA Special English Technology Report.

If researchers want to know what happened on a particular day, they often look at newspapers published on that day. But, what would happen if newspapers were to stop publishing? Future researchers would likely turn to the web.

The Internet Archive's Wayback Machine at Archive.org has for years saved, or archived, websites from the past. But it only does this once a day for news websites, and even less-often for other websites.

Twenty-nine year old reporter Ben Welsh decided to create a site similar to Archive.org. But, he wanted to archive only news websites. And, he wanted to save their homepages more often.

Mr. Welsh works for the Los Angeles Times newspaper in California. In May he created PastPages.org. The website saves the homepages of seventy news websites from around the world, once an hour. Mr. Welsh says this schedule of what he calls "harvesting" is important in today's quickly-changing news environment.

BEN WELSH: "Because over the course of a day, the narrative arc of a news story can develop quite a bit.

Mr. Welsh says nothing like PastPages.org had ever been done. He says no one had saved the homepages of so many news websites so often, and made that material available to the public. He hopes to keep adding to the site until it is archiving material from up to three hundred news websites around the world.

Ben Welsh spends about sixty dollars a month on storage space for PastPages.org. He feared the cost would increase beyond what he could afford, so he asked people for help through the website Kickstarter. Thousands of Americans use the website to seek money to pay for their projects. Two days after Ben Welsh made his request, PastPages.org had received promises for half of the five thousand dollars that he had asked for. Within about a week, he had gotten all of it and more. Mr. Welsh says he will use the money to expand his website.

BEN WELSH: "Then my hope is, is on top of that to build some features specifically targeted to media researchers and media critics so that they'll be able to more-easily access data like this to do an analysis of media coverage."

Stephanie Bluestein was a reporter at the Los Angeles Times. She is now an assistant professor of journalism at California State University, Northridge. She believes PastPages.org will prove to be a valuable resource.

STEPHANIE BLUESTEIN: "Until now we haven't had any archives that's been to this frequency. So now you could go back and look hour-by-hour and see the placement of what was the lead story, how the headline changed and how one newspaper played a story versus another one. Now you can actually compare.

Professor Bluestein says today's news changes so quickly that even archiving once an hour may soon not be enough.

And that's the VOA Special English Technology Report. I'm Christopher Cruise.