

Analysis piece/profile plus a pitch

# Show your sources: the test for AI in American newsrooms

AI promises to help stretched American newsrooms research stories faster. A Bloomberg editor's experience points to a practical test: whether reporters can follow an answer back to its evidence.

**By Zygmantas Mascinskas**

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Whitney Lee was told not to summarise.

During a career in newsroom research at Newsday, the New York Daily News and NBC News, she found sources, searched archives, filed public-records requests and ran background checks for reporters working against deadlines. When handing over research, she supplied the articles, their publishers and their dates. The reporter had to read them.

"If I misunderstand something and then you go off of my summary, we have a problem," said Whitney Lee, now a librarian at New York University.

Her instruction addressed a risk that existed long before generative artificial intelligence- an intermediary's interpretation becoming a substitute for examining the evidence.

AI makes that problem newly relevant. It can process documents and return an answer in language polished enough to sound authoritative. Some tools supply the sources behind their responses. Others leave the reporter with more work to establish where a claim came from.

For American newsrooms adopting the technology after years of staffing cuts, that difference matters. Saving time on research helps only if journalists can still check what they find.

## The missing layer

The Associated Press set out its approach in updated newsroom standards published on 23 July 2026. Approved uses include preliminary research, document summaries, transcription, translation and headline suggestions. Journalists must review and edit AI output before publication, while retaining responsibility for sourcing, verification and editorial judgement.

Making that review meaningful requires time, knowledge and access to the underlying material.

Those resources are under pressure. Northwestern University's 2025 State of Local News report found that the US newspaper industry had lost more than three-quarters of its jobs since 2005. That figure covers employment across newspaper businesses. Almost 40 per cent of local newspapers had disappeared over the same period, while about 50 million Americans lived with limited or no access to local news.

Lee's experience gives that contraction a human scale. There were four librarians when she arrived at NBC's Newsday, she recalled, compared with roughly 10 to 12 about a decade earlier. Newsday retained a research team when she spoke, but the Daily News and NBC had effectively eliminated their departments, she said.

The newspaper industry's decline began well before the recent spread of generative AI. The question is how the technology fits into newsrooms where reporters have already absorbed work once shared with specialist colleagues.

## The case for the tool

For a reporter facing a lengthy earnings transcript or a folder of government documents, the attraction is straightforward. Finding the relevant material faster leaves more time to ask questions about it.

Victoria Cavaliere, a Bloomberg News editor and NYU adjunct professor, described using an internal tool to check quotations against earnings transcripts. The system could locate the relevant passage and page, presenting the result with a "green check".

Her account is consistent with Bloomberg's public description of ASKB, a conversational AI interface for its Terminal. The company says the product provides attribution to original research documents and news sources. That describes its intended operation; it does not independently establish its accuracy.

Cavaliere also described using ChatGPT to help with headlines. It supplied suggestions she could combine and rework when she was struggling to find the wording herself. "It's only made my job easier thus far," she said.

Her experience gives substance to the argument for adoption. Assistance can be useful without producing a finished piece of journalism.

At USA Today, the task is sometimes more administrative. According to a Microsoft account published in June, journalists use an AI-assisted system to help turn reporting questions into public-records requests and direct them to the appropriate agency. The journalist reviews, edits and sends the request.

Thomas Elia, a newsroom leader at The Palm Beach Post, told Microsoft that drafting a request could take an hour. The account includes comments from newsroom staff, but does not provide independently measured error rates or establish how widely the system is used across USA Today's newsrooms. It remains a customer story published by the technology supplier.

John Surico, a New York journalist and NYU adjunct professor, also sees potential in the research stage. In written responses for this story, he said AI could help reporters find and summarise economic datasets that would otherwise require more extensive searching.

But summarising data already involves interpretation. Deciding which figures belong together, which period to compare and which qualifications to retain goes beyond clerical work.

That distinction strengthens the case for judging AI by the task it performs. A system that helps locate a document presents a different problem from one that explains what the document means.

There is a reasonable objection to treating the technology as an exceptional threat. Journalism has absorbed databases, search engines and spreadsheets, each allowing reporters to do work that previously required more time or specialist assistance. AI could extend that process. If it frees someone to interview a source or examine a company's accounts more closely, efficiency serves the reporting.

The difficulty comes when retrieving information and interpreting it are folded into a single answer. A conventional archive search returns documents to inspect. A generative system can return a conclusion that appears to have done the inspection already. Cavaliere's example shows one way to preserve the route back.

## When the numbers look convincing

An early experiment in US personal-finance journalism demonstrates why a promise of human review is insufficient.

In late 2022, technology website CNET began publishing financial explainers produced with an AI tool. Futurism reported that the articles appeared under the byline "CNET Money Staff", with an explanation of the automation available through the byline disclosure. CNET said editors reviewed and fact-checked the work.

Futurism subsequently identified errors in an article explaining compound interest. After CNET examined the experiment, The Verge reported in January 2023 that 41 of the 77 AI-generated articles carried corrections.

Editors had already been involved. Readers were receiving material presented as having passed human scrutiny, yet more than half the articles subsequently needed correction.

This was an early experiment, and its results cannot establish how today's systems perform. AP's current standards explicitly define permitted uses and leave verification with journalists. CNET nevertheless illustrates why the details of that verification matter: who checks the answer, what evidence they can inspect and whether they repeat the calculation.

Economic reporting makes those questions particularly demanding. A figure can be accurately copied and still be misleading if it refers to the wrong period, omits a revision or compares measures that are not equivalent. Finding a number in a document is only part of establishing what it tells the reader.

Surico put the risk directly: "When you dodge that digging, you sacrifice the scrutiny that comes with it."

His first instruction to reporters assessing potentially misleading economic information was equally clear. "Check your primary sources!" Surico added.

That means following a figure back to the agency, filing or institution that produced it, then examining its definitions and limitations. A link establishes where a claim came from; it does not settle whether the claim supports the story being written.

Surico identified staffing as a particular vulnerability in local journalism. An outlet might lack both a fact-checker and a journalist comfortable working with data. In those circumstances, an error has fewer opportunities to be challenged before publication.

The consequences extend beyond an embarrassing correction. Surico warned that misleading information could deepen polarisation, reinforce false narratives and reduce trust in institutions, including the media.

Readers face the same problem

That concern now reaches both ends of the news process. Journalists use AI to research stories, while readers encounter AI-generated accounts of the reporting.

In Pew Research Center findings published in April 2025, based on a survey conducted in August 2024, 66 per cent of US adults were extremely or very concerned about people receiving inaccurate information from AI.

A separate Pew survey published in June 2026 found that 60 per cent of US adults had read AI-generated summaries at the top of search results, while 13 per cent used chatbots to get news.

These findings describe audience behaviour and attitudes, rather than the quality of newsroom tools. Their relevance is the additional step between reporting and its readers. A carefully sourced article can itself become the material for another summary, with readers left to decide whether to follow the links and examine the original account.

The question of traceability therefore continues after publication. It concerns both the evidence a journalist uses and the reporting an audience eventually sees.

## Show your documents

Cavaliere's account supplies a practical example of what Lee's old rule looks like inside an AI-assisted newsroom. The editor receives a route to the earnings transcript and the passage that needs checking.

The useful feature is the evidence behind the green check. Matching the words does not establish that a quotation has been used fairly, or that the surrounding interpretation is sound. It gives the journalist somewhere to begin.

For smaller American newsrooms, that raises a question beyond how much time AI saves: do the research tools available to them provide an equally clear route back to their sources?

Surico's warning about outlets without a fact-checker or a data-savvy journalist makes that question consequential. A source trail cannot replace those colleagues. It can help a reporter examine the basis of an answer without starting the search again.

Cavaliere's example shows how assistance and scrutiny can work together. How widely that approach is available across local newsrooms, and whether reporters have enough time to use it properly, remain questions this reporting cannot resolve.

Publishers need to answer them alongside their claims of efficiency. Buying a faster summary does not remove the work of checking its figures, context and conclusions.

Lee handed reporters the articles. The new tools should make it just as easy to open them.