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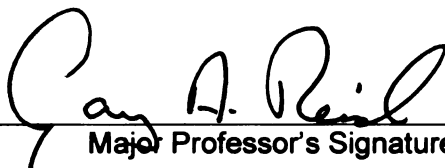
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**CONVERGENCE IN THE CLASSROOM: EXPANDING NEW MEDIA DELIVERY
AND CONTENT IN JOURNALISM AND BROADCAST COURSES**

By

Jeremy Whiting

A THESIS

**Submitted to
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ABSTRACT

CONVERGENCE IN THE CLASSROOM: EXPANDING NEW MEDIA DELIVERY AND CONTENT IN JOURNALISM AND BROADCAST COURSES

By

Jeremy Whiting

Journalism and broadcast programs have long been staples in high school curricula. The skills needed to produce a successful newspaper, yearbook, radio program, or television show reach across multiple disciplines, fulfilling many state standards along the way. Students work collaboratively to create something original with a focus on their local audience. Increased technology use and availability has altered how these publications are created. However, that has not lead to widespread changes in how content is delivered over the Internet.

Meanwhile, the professional journalism world has taken steps to embrace these changes. More content is being delivered online, with a focus on new media technologies instead of the written word. Content is still at the heart of respectable publications, but they are adapting to fit changing consumer needs. As this happens, student publications must take the cue and start creating new types of content. They can repurpose traditional reports for new media applications. This will prepare young journalists for their future careers.

This paper will present the reasons why some schools have already made the switch, as well as show ways to reproduce the results in other classrooms.

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INTRODUCTION

The world of journalism is changing. Ever since the Internet became widely accessible to the public, media outlets have had to grapple with the consequences of constant information available at everyone's fingertips. More and more, it seems that newspaper, radio, and television organizations are not the first ones to deliver breaking news. When a major event happens, people can find out about it over the course of the day through websites, blogs, text messages, and social networks. Traditional reporters now have real competition for people's attention.

News organizations approached the online information landscape in different ways. There was not one single unified approach to addressing the potential benefits and risks of publishing information on the Internet. Some, like The New York Times, put the same content online that was in their print edition and charged a subscription fee. Others, like NBC and Microsoft, partnered to create a new online experience. Most have embraced the changes that have occurred in the world, and now they are trying to use new frameworks to reach an audience and remain relevant.

Does this mean that there will no longer be a focus on journalism education? At the scholastic level, schools have continued to offer newspaper, radio, and broadcast classes. These publications will continue in some form; content must be delivered to the public, and traditional news organizations are still the best suited to research and report on current events in an articulate and

reliable way. The high school newspaper and yearbook will continue because they are valuable ways for students to learn about journalism. But, they will evolve just like professional publications have.

Journalism education has many unique benefits that educators find very appealing. It allows teachers to engage with students in an authentic way. Instead of simply telling about a subject, students actively participate in and set the agenda for an end product. Along the way, they pick up writing, design, photography, business, leadership and technology skills. They engage with the content because they need the skills to create a product that their audience – their peers – will find interesting and worthwhile.

State and national policy makers have also seen the benefits of an education in journalism. In Michigan, for example, state standards for English and the fine arts can directly be applied to this type of instruction. The Michigan Interscholastic Press Association is an organization at Michigan State University that educates and supports student journalists and their teachers. As a curriculum-planning tool for administrators and teachers, they have aligned the skills and activities student journalists participate in with those relevant state standards. Almost every aspect of a student publication's day-to-day operations fulfills multiple state standards. In a single class, teachers are engaging students over multiple disciplines, tying in lessons that may or may not be covered in other subject areas.

There is also a practical element to journalism education. Even if students are not planning to become involved in professional journalism after they graduate, they are still learning lessons about media literacy and how information is reported in the professional media. For example, when presented with similar reports on competing cable news networks like Fox News and CNN, people must be able to decipher biases, motives, and viewpoints that are presented as facts. This critical thinking process will stick with them throughout their lives. Though the physical media they use to find news and the technology to access it may change, the stories and how they are reported will not. Insights into the content will allow them to be more active and informed citizens.

While journalism education is generally still appreciated and present in the scholastic world, the adoption of these new forms of media is not nearly as widespread as it is across professional organizations. There are certainly examples on the state and national stage that demonstrate a move towards mimicking professional approaches, but most programs still rely solely on the time-tested forms of print and broadcast publications.

There are real benefits of incorporating new forms of digital media in the publication process. Students planning to enter the field of journalism are able to experience the process that a modern newsroom goes through when gathering news. Publication and broadcast programs also provide a valuable outreach tool for the students and the school. Student work can be featured on the national level, giving student reporters a leg-up when entering the next stage of their

careers. School districts can also benefit from the positive public relations and outreach that these programs can provide, possibly even tapping into an additional revenue stream through online advertisements and other services.

Student publications must mirror the professional world's embrace of changes in online content delivery. This paper will present the reasons why some schools have already made the switch, as well as show practical ways to reproduce the results in other classrooms.

CHAPTER 1

WHAT IS THE VALUE OF AN ONLINE SCHOLASTIC PUBLICATION?

It is worthwhile to begin by looking at what factors make scholastic publications attractive. Many schools already subscribe to the idea that there is merit in a journalism curriculum – the subject area encompasses skills in writing, design, photography, business and leadership. These aspects have traditionally been expressed not through rote memorization or standardized tests, but through skills demonstrated with the successful completion of a product. Schools are enriched by the presence of a yearbook, newspaper, radio station, or video production staff.

Like other subject areas, it is important to keep up with modern advances in the industry. After all, English teachers update their curriculum with new written works. Science teachers introduce the latest discoveries to their classes and relate them to the field they are studying. History teachers reference current events and compare them to what has happened in the past. It would be unreasonable for journalism teachers to stand apart and ignore the changing landscape around them.

The online world presents a greater opportunity for student journalists to put their skills to use in a mixed-mode world. Their peers do not consume information in just one form. Therefore, it makes sense to publish content in the many different ways that their audience engages with it, using the written word, audio, photography, and video. An online publication makes this goal easy to accomplish.

A Cross-Curricular Activity

Administrators are increasingly finding themselves in difficult financial situations. Programs are being cut from most schools as funding continues to dwindle. It is more important than ever before to choose classes that offer the most value for their costs. Journalism programs meet these criteria by engaging students in cross-curricular skills.

Perhaps the most important element of journalism and broadcasting is the ability to effectively communicate an idea to an audience. This includes, and often starts with, the written word. Whether it is a fully fleshed-out story, radio announcement, script, or interview notes, students are using skills that are traditionally stressed and taught in an English classroom. This overlap occurs in every aspect of journalism education, strengthening the skills in both disciplines.

There is evidence that shows the crossover pays off. Dvorak's 2008 study shows almost half of high school journalism students excelled in the language arts, having enrolled in Advanced Placement or honors English classes. In the areas of social studies and foreign language, even more students were enrolled in Advanced Placement, accelerated, or honors classes.

Additional quantitative data is found when reviewing students' grade point averages. The same study found that journalism students had higher grades in the areas of English, math, social studies, science, foreign language, and art. Their cumulative grade point averages were 3.38, compared to the 3.28 average for students not on a journalism staff. The study notes this, as with all of the

individual grade point averages in the core subject areas, as a statistically significant difference. The higher grades are not due to a particular sample of students; rather, they are due to their participation in journalism activities.

It can be difficult to justify continued funding of non-core subject area classes in a school. Few, if any, directly utilize so many skills integral to the core subject areas and improve students' grade point averages across the board. Journalism education offers these unique advantages that other programs cannot easily replicate.

Fulfilling State Standards

The academic world is becoming more results-based, looking for set outcomes across radically different programs, community values, and demographics. Nevertheless, showing how programs fit into common core standards that exist on the national and state level can help guarantee funding and prove the worth and effectiveness of a school's instruction.

In many schools, journalism classes exist simply as electives. Journalism instruction supports standards set for English, fine arts, technology, and social studies. Schools hoping to enhance offerings in core subject areas can easily look to a journalism program to fulfill additional state standards.

For example, the Michigan Interscholastic Press Association has assembled a document that compares the Michigan state standards for English and Fine Arts instruction to a typical journalism classroom. Most standards are

met with multiple pieces of evidence, showing that many of the activities student journalists learn about and engage with fulfill nationally recognized benchmarks in core subject areas.

Whether on their own or as a supplement to instruction in other classes, journalism programs have content that is recognized as essential for young people to study throughout the course of their high school careers. The value of this content cannot easily be dismissed.

Media Literacy

The real value of an education lies in teaching students skills they will use throughout their personal and professional lives. There are benefits to journalism education beyond standardized benchmarks that school administrators need to meet. A publication or broadcast program does this by critically engaging students. They must be aware of the responsibilities that come with producing material. Likewise, they must consider the implications of consuming content in our information-rich society. Even if students do not go on to a career in a journalism-related field, the lessons they learn can inform their understanding of media consumption and what messages are being transmitted to them.

This sort of thinking is becoming more commonplace across all subject areas. As early as elementary school, students are taught about the dangers of sharing information on the Internet. This safety concern is really a beginning lesson on the power of the media. People are interacting with information and

technology in more ways than they have ever done before. With that freedom comes the responsibility to choose carefully what information is shared and to whom it is being transmitted. This is a type of discussion that may take place in a computer class when using a search engine or an English class when choosing a credible website. A broadcast or journalism classroom differs in that not only are the students thinking about these things while browsing, but also while creating content.

Schools often promote the idea of encouraging students to be graduates who demonstrate good citizenship through responsible decisions, engage with their community, and serve the broader goals of society. Those in positions of power now need to address the idea of a person's digital citizenship. Young people must learn that online behaviors may lead to offline consequences.

Rather than passively consuming media, students are now adding to the discussion. Everyone is, in effect, a broadcaster on the Internet. An online broadcast or journalism program teaches students how to produce their messages, as well as provide experiences with transmitting them in a responsible and thoughtful manner.

Delivering Content Where It Will Be Viewed

It used to be standard practice for people to get their news in the morning from a newsstand, on the way to work, over their radio, or in the evening on the television after dinner. While these forms are still used today, people choose to

supplement them throughout the day. The Internet has opened the floodgates of information that can be accessed to the point of user overload. People no longer have to be fed the news at predetermined times in set ways; instead, a large range of devices can access multiple forms of media at any time. Increasingly, these “on demand” experiences are overtaking the traditional news models.

The degree to which we interact with dynamic news over the Internet is validated by research conducted in 2010 by Arbitron Inc. and Edison Research. Their study found that 84% of people living in the United States have access to the Internet. That marks a great change from a little over a decade ago, when only 50% reported Internet access in 1999. However, that rate has stayed relatively consistent over the last five years, showing that people are generally accustomed to using the communication network.

A more significant change can be found by looking at broadband access. If you wanted to go online in the early days of the Internet in the mid-1990s, you would have used telephone lines to dial into the network at very slow speeds. This was acceptable for checking e-mail, using search engines and browsing simple websites. But, it was not fast enough to access richer audio and video content. Broadband access over cable and faster telephone line connections has risen tremendously in the last few years as it has become just as affordable as dial-up access. In 2002, only 21% of Internet users had broadband access. Today, the rate is 84%.

This means that not only do people have access to the web, but they also want to interact with it in more advanced ways. With higher broadband penetration comes the ability for news sites to offer more forms of information, such as podcasts, videos, photo slideshows, and interactive content. These are no longer confined to one medium. Real convergence is happening as journalists embrace a wide range of skills to tell a story in the best way possible based on the content and their intended audience.

Some people wait in lines at retail stores to be the first ones to grab the latest technologies. These are “early adopters,” and they used to be the only ones accessing the many tools available on the Internet. But, they are no longer the only ones making full use of the online world’s vast capabilities. The study found 42% of people are viewing the Internet and see its advantages as essential to their lives. When asked if they would eliminate television or Internet access, there was a 50-50 split. In less than two decades of popular use, the Internet has changed how we interact with media and our perceptions of what constitutes a daily necessity.

Most relevant to our discussion, younger people are more apt to embrace the Internet over other forms of information. Of those surveyed ages 18-24, 72% would rather give up their television over Internet access. With the target audience for scholastic publications more likely to notice information in an online form, it is important for student journalists to tailor content to that medium. In this way, the schoolhouse gates do not limit student reporting, and the content

remains relevant to those who will shape the future landscape of information distribution.

A Community Focus on an International Scale

As information grows more accessible on the Internet, so does the need for further awareness of the expanding audience a publication can reach. National and world news is widely accessible on the Internet. Where local and scholastic publications make their mark is in community oriented reporting that tells stories about what people are experiencing in a specific area. Online journalism does not and should not change the inherent mission of a content provider. Instead, it makes that rich content more accessible to a larger audience. Therefore, a publication should not feel compelled to add more outside stories to its online format solely because it is accessible to the world. The strength is in local reporting that the whole world can share. Other information can easily be obtained from other sources.

Most people do not stay in a single community for their entire lives, but they often want to know about what is happening back home. Besides the occasional news bit relayed by friends and family, an online publication gives friends and former members of a community the opportunity to stay connected. As students graduate and move on, they are still able to see what is happening with friends, siblings, and other community members with the convenience of opening their laptops from anywhere in the world.

CHAPTER 2

THE PROFESSIONAL MEDIA'S APPROACH TO ONLINE MEDIA

Commercial journalists and broadcasters have already taken the plunge into the online world. After only 15 years of popular access to the Internet, there is still a lot of differentiation between organizations in how news is reported, when it is released, and to whom it is delivered. However, some best practices are beginning to emerge after considerable trial and error. These include regular site updates, use of multimedia to tell stories, and features that center on the community. While these approaches will likely change over time, they are an important first step for a publication serving an online audience.

However, what a professional publication does online only serves as a general guide for a scholastic publication to follow. Many of the services large newspapers and broadcasters offer are irrelevant or inappropriate for the student press. After all, it would be impractical for a high school newspaper to have in-depth business news or offer a personals section through its website. Instead, scholastic media can pick and choose what types of content are most relevant to their audience. Students can modify and create new approaches that best serve their peers based on what they encounter in the professional world.

Existing Research

News organizations are not only facing competition from each other, but also from technology companies. A newspaper has a staff of reporters to sift through news leads, conduct research, interview people, and write stories that

appeal to readers. A technology company most often simply aggregates, or collects, outside news stories for a single site. Even with the lack of original content, consumers are placing more trust in these brand names that they recognize over well-established journalists.

This marks an era where the marketing gurus may be overtaking the traditional news media through careful image control. A study conducted in 2010 by Zogby International showed that adults overwhelmingly trusted Apple, Google and Microsoft more than the general idea of “the media.” Those companies each scored a 49% trust level. Even Facebook scored a 13% trust level compared to the media’s score of 8%. This shows that the public responds better to companies that have massive public relations arms that feed out only positive information. There are plenty of credible journalists, but they must compete with radical columnists and biased pundits on cable news networks. The idea of an impartial free press has been tarnished by the 24-hour news cycle.

It becomes more important than ever to continue educating students as ethical, responsible journalists. Along with these baseline values, they must be equipped with the skills necessary to compete with technology companies that do not necessarily strive for an unbiased view. This is why a move towards online scholastic journalism is vital.

While the Zogby survey focused on only adults, the study conducted in 2010 by Arbitron Inc. and Edison Research surveyed people 12 and older. It found an increasing amount of people using the Internet for media applications

and information about the content. The report showed that 63% of people listened to the radio to find out about new music in 2002, but in 2010 that figure had dropped to 39%. At the same time, those logging onto the Internet to find out about new music was only 9% in 2002, but had risen to 31% in 2010. This shows a definite shift of people's attention to online forms of information.

The Arbitron data also shows that people are using richer media that only broadband access can make possible. About 43 million people listen to Internet radio and 74 million watch online video. These numbers are beginning to rival traditional delivery methods like over the air radio and television broadcasts. This allows for more voices available in the public sphere, but it does not necessarily differentiate between trustworthy content creators. What it does show, though, is that people are looking for new ways of interacting with content, and they are placing a decreasing emphasis on who is providing it. This is where the established media can step in to not only offer rich user experiences with audio and video, but also content that is relevant, well-researched, and journalistically sound.

These studies show that there is a strong need for trustworthy online news sources that deliver content across multiple forms of media. By creating rich content that users can interact with online, professional publications will keep engaging with readers while continuing their mission of providing balanced reporting on important issues.

Creating the Website

If you walk into a bookstore, you will find shelves lined with books detailing how to build a website. Most likely, each of these books will suggest a different approach. Professional media's websites are just as varied. Some have a simplistic, straightforward structure. Others have intricate systems of classifying data and navigating the user throughout the site. One is not necessarily better than the other, but they must meet the needs of the audience to be truly successful.

A publication builds its reputation through solid reporting and insightful commentary. Its brand image uses logos, color schemes, and layouts to reinforce these attributes. An online site needs to fit in with this brand image. Quite often, news and broadcast groups will hire an outside company to produce their online content, ensuring that the print and online versions of the brand are in sync.

These online sites use specialized systems that do not need heavy technical maintenance once they are setup. Therefore, it makes sense to hire a company just once instead of retaining a person on staff to do this. The group is consulted to determine the color scheme, sections of the website, and what types of content will be uploaded. Then, a unique content management system is used to deliver the data. Once this skeleton of a site is in place, the publication can start adding in content. A typical site includes the written word, audio, and video, no matter if the traditional form is in print or a radio or television broadcast.

In other cases, the news organization may be part of a national media group that spreads out costs between all affiliates. Here, a set content management system can be created to serve all of the member news organizations throughout the country. Using this same framework, individual publications can modify the site to their needs by adding in features and controlling the design and color scheme. These sites end up looking very different from each other, but they still have the same underlying framework, making them easy to customize and reuse. A typical user would never suspect that two different publications having two radically different websites are built using the same system.

Once the site is created, in house staff can update the content easily and rapidly. There does not have to be one set person in control of posting stories to the Internet; rather, many staff members can submit content using their own login names. This spreads out the work so that the information does not bottleneck with one person. It is still important to maintain an online editor who reviews each submission before it becomes available to the world. The tools are available to publish within seconds, but that does not diminish the need for proper editorial control of the publication.

There are initial costs to creating a modern professional website, but the fees are usually assessed just one time. After that, publications can deliver as much content as they want with their own simple framework online.

Types of Content

With a solid framework in place to deliver news, an organization must consider what it wants to publish. A professional online publication can offer a lot of information. They have huge archives of news material to share. They also have the advantage of many reporters whose stories can appear in an online form just as easily as in print.

Some publications choose to share all of the content from their print editions or broadcast news. This can be in the form of a PDF document, which is a downloadable online file that mimics the print layout. For broadcasts, audio or video files can be offered that users can download or stream live over the Internet. These have the advantage of being seen at any time, offering a true “on-demand” experience. Still, other organizations choose to offer only snippets or highlights from their traditional forms.

Expanded coverage is becoming increasingly popular, with content that cannot be presented in the traditional form of a publication. Online media is the perfect place for this coverage to exist. It allows for interactive forms of content that are not possible in traditional publications. The length of a newspaper column or time scheduled between commercials no longer dictates the content.

Technology innovations and cheaper costs of storage have allowed for increased coverage online. It is easy to upload rich media to the Internet for delivery and storage. But, the more storage capacity a website uses, the more it costs to host the files online. Publications can make use of blogs, podcasts, and

other features, but they must have a plan for storing them. Offline storage can be used to save older material. As these files build up, so do the publication's archives of material. These can be reused later for other stories or to generate revenue.

Besides providing journalistic content, publication websites also feature relevant community information. This has been done for a long time in newspapers as marketplace listings for real estate, cars, employment, and other goods and services. Now, this information is accessible only in a searchable form. So, if a person is looking for some extra income as a babysitter, they do not need to see all of the other job postings that do not concern them. People can get straight to the sections that matter most to them.

There are many other opportunities for these websites to serve as community hubs of information. By having dedicated community and special interest sections, the online publications can become a home base for people of certain interests. If a person is on the go, they can easily access the latest school closing information and updated weather forecasts from a website they trust.

Since a publication is more likely to be part of a media group than an independent voice, a website may contain links to other associated publications and content served from them. While it may not be relevant for a person to click the link for The Denver Post on The Detroit News' website, some of the content they create may be relevant. If the Detroit Tigers are playing the Colorado Rockies, the Denver paper may have interviews, statistics, and insights that the

Detroit paper cannot easily report by itself. With this shared content, this information can still be easily accessible to interested readers.

Broadband access has become the norm and mobile devices are cheap and prevalent in our society. With that come opportunities for users to submit content to a publication. Broadcasts have begun to rely on user submitted photos and videos of breaking news where a film crew cannot realistically get to the scene in time. Including first-person footage of natural disasters, accidents, and other newsworthy items presents the news in a vivid light. People can also interact by leaving comments on stories and participating in discussion forums. A public forum no longer has to be limited to the traditional letter to the editor in the Sunday paper. Now, the discussion can include more voices, have a wider range of topics, and continue around the clock.

Sites on the Internet are also finding that they do not have to – and probably should not – limit their content to simply their own domain. Most news organizations now have a presence on third-party social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter. While the users may not be necessarily visiting the full website when they follow these groups, the organizations are still tapping into a large audience that would not necessarily be everyday visitors.

Revenue

Most sites on the Internet are still struggling to come up with a model that brings in money. Not every site can be a Yahoo! or Google, which brought in \$3.5

million and \$14.8 million in profit last year, respectively. But, there is no denying the amount of people using the Internet to access data. With some many readers online, the advantages of the Internet cannot be ignored.

Some have moved their subscription services to a hybrid model, like The Detroit News and the Detroit Free Press. Due to increasing costs and fewer subscribers, the papers cut home delivery to only a few days a week. They justified this change by bundling subscriptions with an enhanced online section that makes PDF versions of all pages available. This has cut costs tremendously, while delivering more content to the readers throughout the day.

Advertisements are a staple of most websites. Publications are no different, but they often present them as community information sections. A broadcaster or print publication can partner with certain businesses or advertising banks might provide online circulars in special sections. They are billed as trusted home improvement sections or reader messages. This gives the businesses more credibility and gives the site more than the traditional banner advertisements offered by Google and other providers.

Traditional news organizations have been around for a long time and hold vast amounts of archived material. They are looking for ways this information. One popular way is to offer photo reprint services and page reprints. With a vast library of images and pages that have been published, papers can provide a service of sharing a reader's favorite photo from a festival, while still making some money in the process. Historic pages can be offered in stylish frames.

These things could only be accessed from microfiche or closed off libraries in the past. Publications are increasingly becoming more open with their back catalog, but they are learning how to profit from it.

Finally, there are aspects of a website that are hard to quantify. As separate as they can seem from the traditional forms of a publication, they are still an extension of that brand. The community services they provide may indirectly bring more money to a publication through customer loyalty, new subscriptions, and word of mouth recommendations. Websites are also convenient portals for renewing print subscriptions, looking up station information, and finding radio and television schedules. The website is the central key to pushing the brand throughout the day over multiple media to enhance and extend the traditional form of a publication.

National vs. Local Approaches

There are certainly differences in how publications approach the online world based on how large their audience is. This determines how much time and money they can spend on their online product. The vast network of CBS can divert resources to maintaining, upgrading, and rolling out new features for their online sites. But, the local CBS affiliate station cannot do that so easily.

National sites tend to supply more updates throughout the day. With reporters around the country and correspondents stationed throughout the world, the big media organizations can maintain a true 24-hour news cycle. A local

paper with a community focus has far less news to report. Updates do come throughout the day, but fewer reporters are available to handle the workload.

Bigger sites are usually well designed. Teams of web designers that specialize in user interfaces continually make the national sites easier to use than their local counterparts. This user interface is key to making sure the audience is able to find exactly what they are looking for without having to stumble around different links and sections. Local sites often look like they cram a lot of material into a small space to try to maximize ad revenue. This tends to make it harder to find information on the site. The disadvantage likely comes back to budgetary reasons, where local sites cannot update their underlying software that frequently, and they do not employ user interface designers to continually tweak the layout of each page.

Some news organizations have experience spanning across multiple traditional forms like print, radio, and television. They are in a much better position to offer more rich media on their sites. Along with a written story, their teams can also provide audio and video footage for the user to interact with. The bigger the organization, the more they can devote time and resources to more online only exclusives.

It may seem like local news outlets are at a significant disadvantage to the national organizations. This is not necessarily so. The bottom line is that a publication must recognize its unique goals and play to its strengths. A national publication must cater to stories of general interest. They have a duty to report on

the big news that people want to find out about in a timely fashion. Local publications better service local communities as a portal for a very specific audience.

Emerging Practices

The professional media has approached the world of online journalism in many ways, delivering content in many forms. One consistent element throughout the groups is the perception that online media will become an increasingly important part of people's everyday lives. News organizations recognize this. They are improving their sites to become community hubs. With regular updates and pertinent content, the professional media will stay relevant as it adapts to new forms.

CHAPTER 3

THE SCHOLASTIC MEDIA'S APPROACH TO ONLINE MEDIA

Unlike professional media, a scholastic publication is almost always aimed at serving a local audience. Therefore, it becomes a little easier to differentiate what elements are most relevant for these publications to serve online. Many communities are based entirely around the school district. A large audience is already engaged with the content because they have family or friends who are impacted by news from the students' perspective.

Even with a steady, built-in audience, scholastic publications do face some challenges. They cannot maintain a large staff to service both an intricate print and online publication. So, there has to be overlap and thoughtful consideration as to what are the most important elements to feature for the audience.

Techniques for these websites vary not so much by region, but by the quality of established programs. Those students and teachers who attend seminars, conferences, and workshops to stay current on journalistic trends will likely have more advanced online programs. A strong vision is needed to change the staff structure to allow this sort of organization to run smoothly and flourish.

Clear leadership is necessary from the teacher, who functions as the publication's adviser, and its editorial board. An online publication offers many opportunities, but there must be set standards and ethics. These are the same that govern traditional print and broadcast publications.

Existing Research

The audience for a scholastic publication is spending more time online. While the extended community of parents, alumni, and friends may not be in the younger demographic, the primary people a school news organization serves are the people currently in the school. Tailoring the content to reach those people as much as possible makes it more relevant to their daily lives.

Research conducted by Arbitron Inc. and Edison Research shows that users ages 12-34 use the Internet as their first or preferred source for discovering new music. With access anywhere at anytime, people have grown accustomed to turning to an online source of information before seeking it out in a different medium. Instead of being fed information blindly, people can actively search it out using specific criteria. The same process can be used when accessing content. Users no longer need to skim a whole newspaper or wait through a broadcast; now, they can easily use search terms or jump to a section they are interested in.

More people also cite prevalent use of mobile devices such as cell phones, netbooks, and e-book readers as a reason for not engaging with traditional forms of media. The same study by Arbitron showed the 12-17 and 18-24 year-old demographics spend less time with over-the-air radio due to iPods and other portable MP3 players. The evidence shows there is a trend of moving away from established media forms for younger people. Scholastic publications need to reassess the ways they deliver content so they can remain relevant to a young person's digital lifestyle.

Choosing the Platform

Professional media often hire a company to design and build their website, but most school publications do not have that luxury. There is often little money to buy the necessary tools like voice recorders, cameras, and video equipment for reporters to do their jobs. Contracting with an outside source is a unrealistic option. This does not necessarily put student publications leaps and bounds behind their professional peers; rather, they must get creative and innovative in finding ways to deliver their content.

In the 1990s, the first online student publications started cropping up. At this time, the students were learning about using coding techniques to build websites. Looking for a cheap and easy way to get online, these staff employed basic skills in HTML to construct rudimentary websites. With dial-up access being the norm, the pages were not intricate. They usually included no more than text, perhaps a few photos, and links to e-mail the staff.

Technology companies realized how difficult it was to create a website, so they developed programs to do the heavy lifting. Each page on the Internet is composed in a computer code called HTML. A web browser reads this code and uses the instructions to display text, images, and other data. Programs like Macromedia Dreamweaver and Adobe GoLive were among the first to do the coding for an author. Instead of writing lines of computer code, lay people could now focus on the design aesthetics of what they were building.

Still, the skills necessary to use these programs were fairly hard to master. A staff would usually have one or two people called webmasters responsible for building the website, and all content would be uploaded by them. These sites eventually ended up with the same results. Half-finished websites existed on servers that were abandoned when the webmaster moved on. Since every website was built differently, a new webmaster would come in and redesign everything from the ground up. This took a lot of time and was unsustainable. The sites were also difficult to keep updated because only the webmaster had access to it.

In the last few years, content management systems like WordPress and Joomla have emerged. These are online software packages available for free on the Internet. They not only take care of the coding, but also allow for fully functional websites that do not have to be run by traditional webmasters. One person or a small team can be responsible for the design and maintenance of the site, but the whole staff can contribute on their own using simple online forms. As people move on, the site does not have to go with them. Everything is standardized and easy to change as needs of the staff grow or a new design is requested.

Sites are now free, so student publications can look just as good, if not better, than their professional counterparts. Once an online presence has been established, a staff can pay for more advanced features on their site to enhance

what the audience experiences. Sites created using this method are more reliable, easier to navigate, and faster to upgrade than any previous method.

Unique Content

In general, a student publication can offer the same types of content that a professional publication can offer. But, some of the content is not as relevant for a school community. There would not be a lot of value in having a listing of real estate or stock market quotes in a student publication. Like all websites, the content must fit the needs of the intended audience, so there are many things that do and do not make sense.

The bread and butter of an online publication is material that has been released in a different form. This is called repurposing information. While it does not add something unique to the news world, it does offer an alternative way to access information that has already been published. It also serves as a springboard for more in-depth reporting and related features.

A student publication does not usually come out daily or weekly, so the news that happens in between issues or broadcasts can go unreported. A website for this type of publication can fill this gap and deliver content daily. Student reporters do not often have the time or resources to write complete breaking news stories, but a website gives opportunities to report quick facts like sports scores, school board outcomes, and student elections. This fulfills a

unique need that is not met in any other local media. Solid, timely reporting will keep the audience coming back on a regular basis.

A student website can also fill information needs in the community. A scholastic publication can fulfill that need by assembling information on club meetings, performances, sporting events, and dates that are of relevance to the school community. Beat reporters can be assigned to each of these areas to add to the calendar when they are reporting on their normal activities. For sports fans, simply covering the outcomes and scores of games can allow people to follow a team's progress.

An online edition encourages more student voices to be heard. Staff members can contribute an array of blogs, beats, and other unique and expanded content. Like professional publications, user submitted content can enhance stories that are covered. This used to be just limited to letters to the editor or guest columns. Now, people can share not only their thoughts through comments and discussion boards, but also their photos and videos that capture a story from an eyewitness' view.

Scholastic publications are able to take the best of what the print publication has to offer and pair that with the unique advantages of the Internet. But, they must remember that the goal of a local publication is to report on local topics. That means eliminating irrelevant national news from their coverage, or instead, reporting on it with a local perspective. A student-driven, community-focused publication can deliver what a local audience cannot get elsewhere.

Raising Money

Student publications have never been considered to be sustainable moneymakers, but they do a lot to educate students and serve a community. With an online system, there are many ways the program can pay for itself and perhaps make a little extra.

Some online professional publications employ a subscription model for accessing content. While some print-based student publications do this as well, there have not been any student websites that use a subscription model as of yet. While most of the Internet is accessible for free, it would be a hard sell to get a strong audience to pay for local content. While a professional publication's ultimate goal is turning a profit, a scholastic program does not have to abide by this philosophy. Most would cite the responsibility of reporting the news to be a higher priority, so it does not make sense to restrict this information from the general public.

Advertisements are a more traditional and common way that sites generate revenue. Student publications have found success in both selling these separately or bundled with print, radio or television versions. These most often take the forms of banner advertisements or sponsored pages. Besides looking for local sponsors, publications can employ larger groups like Google. Using the company's AdSense program, a constant stream of new advertisements can be delivered to a publication's website without much work from the organization. The ads can be targeted to be relevant to the school community, and measures can

be taken to filter out inappropriate content. The money earned is then simply deposited on a regular basis in a specified account.

Like professional publications, photo reprint services can be used to make some money from material that is being produced for stories. With the wide range of sports and activities happening in the school community, students, parents, and friends have a desire to purchase professional-quality photos. This not only provides a community service, but helps offset production costs. Student publications can provide this service from the ground up, or enter into partnerships with professional media. This might depend on existing contracts with photographers or service producers.

CHAPTER 4

CONSIDERATIONS FOR INTEGRATING ONLINE MEDIA INTO A SCHOLASTIC PUBLICATION

Whether a scholastic publication is well established or relatively new, the move toward an online delivery system is fairly easy and straightforward. The most important considerations come at the beginning of the process when the purpose of the site is defined. All other considerations can be based off this idea, from what type of website is built to how the staff is structured.

Unlike other publications that either sink or swim, an online scholastic publication can be tested and modified before it is shared with the public. A staff can take the time to work out kinks on the design, streamline the production process, and then slowly build a following. The soft rollout can allow the traditional form of the publication either in print, radio, or television broadcast to continue uninterrupted. As more content is available on the website in increasing frequency, marketing campaigns can start to increase the audience.

These suggestions are made with a publication's staff in mind that does not have a deep knowledge of the issues or technologies associated with online journalism. Most individual features can be accomplished for free using online tools. As skills and interest in the site increase, these elements can be upgraded with more advanced services. Some of these require paid subscriptions, but the costs are usually small compared to potential revenue that can be generated through the website.

Adapting and Repurposing Content for the Web

Going online with a publication or broadcast does not mean that completely new content has to appear throughout the entire site. Instead of doubling a staff's workload, it is smarter to reuse stories that have already been written. This is known as repurposing content. A staff can take this repurposed content and expand upon what may already exist in a traditional form for use on the Internet.

Journalists now have a mixed mode platform to report stories with. Content that may have appeared in a newspaper as only a story and photo can be repurposed on the Internet. The same package can now include additional photos, information boxes, video, audio, or other interactive elements. The amount of work in finding the story would not change that much, but the impact to the audience would be greater. Using the forms that best fit the topic, online producer can use material that may already exist to show another side of a story.

A publication can get a lot of mileage out of the material by cross-promoting it. Traditional forms like newspapers or broadcasts can make reference to the expanded coverage available on the website. Conversely, the website can promote the content's original form. Driving the audience to a publication's sister form can add value to the brand and show the reach of the news organization.

Ethical and Legal Considerations

The media does not live in a vacuum. It is entirely dependent upon the audience that will be engaging with it. With proper advising, a student publication has great benefits that the students, faculty, parents, and school community will realize. However, not all districts are ready to allow students the responsibility to report as a free press, either in a traditional form or on the Internet.

Aside from the concerns administrators or parents may have, there are ethical and legal considerations students must face. These are the same that traditional publications face when reporting the news. Just because material is reported on the Internet does not mean the rules of obscenity, unprotected speech, invasion of privacy, and other legal concerns go out the window. Just as these are addressed, some additional points must be considered.

Some publications may debate whether it is appropriate to run full student names or display their images on a website. There is no legal guideline that prohibits this information from being published online, but there may be set district policies in regard to it. Student publications need to look at the ethics of reporting these facts. They should address whether or not their own guidelines are in sync with the community's expectations. Some districts have favored an opt-out policy for student media, where it is assumed that this information may be published unless a student specifically requests it not to be. Other districts bundle this permission with an overall media policy, so student publications, sports announcements, district newsletters, etc. all fall under one agreement.

Legal considerations become more magnified when reporting happens online. Plagiarism is one area that can easily be searched out. Copyrights must be honored, whether the form of the content is print, broadcast, or online. As technology has increased in availability and information has become readily available, people need to be more fluent in what is and is not acceptable to use. A general rule still applies to content online: if you did not produce it, you probably do not have the right to publish it. Students must learn the exceptions to this rule, as well as ways to obtain legal permission to use work in an online publication.

The same ethics and legal considerations that a normal publication or broadcast is bound by apply to work found on the Internet. A strong journalism and broadcast program will honor these guidelines and ensure that students abide by them in a responsible manner.

Expertise Necessary

The great thing about jumping into the world of online journalism is that the skills to get started are not much more advanced than what a typical computer user already knows. Simple sites can use templates where reporters fill out information by cutting and pasting from existing stories. But, the sites can really become impressive as the staff's skills progress.

An easy way to start is by using existing social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Most young people already have at least a Facebook

profile, so there is a built-in audience for the content that is easy to connect to. Students can build a fan page for the publication to preview upcoming stories and post breaking news. Use of social networking sites pairs nicely with a discussion about social media. It can allow a teacher to discuss media literacy and digital citizenship. What is appropriate material to share online? What does “published” mean? These are conversations that students should be having as they share more of themselves with the online world. A student publication provides a great platform to frame the discussion.

From this starting point, there are many options for constructing the website. There are some template-based sites like myhsj.org that allow students to create simple websites specifically geared toward journalism programs. It has the ability to create sections for content, upload PDF documents for people to view, and insert images with the text. While it is simple to use, options for customization are limited, and richer forms of media cannot be embedded in the pages.

Some schools may choose to use a website building package like Adobe Dreamweaver. Others may prefer to code the site using web standards like XHTML and CSS. These are powerful tools that can build impressive sites, but are not as easy for an entire staff to use and consistently update. There is also a significant learning curve associated with these approaches. This makes it likely that if a student is involved with creating a site in this manner, it will be difficult to find a replacement with the same level of talent.

A content management system is a good way of creating professional sites while still maintaining an easy-to-update system. The online software has a simple setup, yet offers a lot of customization. WordPress.com hosts free sites that are based on the WordPress content management system. Most features that a student publication would want are available free of charge. But, as further customization and advanced features are requested, publications can pay a fee to add on to the site. These would include further customization of one of the theme designs, getting a unique domain name, or adding more storage space.

For staffs that want detailed control of every aspect of the site and are willing to deal with web servers and hosting packages, content management software is available for download. WordPress and Joomla are two popular systems used on the Internet that can be heavily customized. However, this requires someone on staff with technical expertise to maintain the software.

Budget Impact

An online publication can be started with a modest investment. Sites can range from totally free all the way up to completely hosted systems that cost about \$1,000 annually. The cost is quite reasonable considering what an online publication teaches students and brings to the community.

Perhaps the simplest upgrade is obtaining a domain. This is the unique URL that people type into a web browser to access a site. Free sites will give you an address by default like myschoolpublication.wordpress.com, but a scholastic

program could choose to register for the domain myschoolpublication.com instead. In 2010, this costs about \$10 a year, and it helps to build a site's brand.

As a site adds more features, particularly those that make use of rich media like audio and video, there may be need for more storage space than what is given for free. In this case, a publication can choose a site upgrade or hosting package that fits their needs. There are many options, but a typical cost is about \$60 for a year of hosting, which will give you space on a server connected to the Internet where you can upload files.

Besides hosting the site on the Internet, the other costs come from the equipment needed to take photos, record audio, and shoot video. Students already have many of the tools to get started in these areas. Cell phones and digital cameras can often take usable audio clips and photos for publishing on the Internet. Existing journalism and broadcast programs may already have a head start in these areas, too. More advanced cameras, sound recorders, and video recorders may already be used for the traditional publications. A school's library or media center may have access to these tools as well.

At the most basic level, a program can start with a simple digital camera for photos, a sound recorder to produce podcasts, and a video recorder to tell visual stories. Digital cameras come in all shapes and sizes. Many websites offer a range of remanufactured or used products that serve as great entry-level tools. For example, a Sony Cybershot digital camera manufactured five years ago can be found for about \$35, while the latest model shoots comparable images

suitable for the Internet and retails for about \$170. Sound and video recorders have a similar range. Students can get decent audio and video by using a simple used digital recorder for a few dollars. The tools are now cheap enough, so a publication has many options for types of equipment and can often purchase several of each with little initial investment.

Like most technology, the more expensive equipment gets you better quality. As a publication grows, there are more advanced cameras and recorders that can be purchased. Students can end up making broadcast-level shows just for distribution on the Internet. Having these nice tools does not take away the need for the content to be relevant to the audience.

The costs for an online publication are quite reasonable to start with, but can add up if the staff chooses to increase the quality of the product. If there is already have a print publication, the costs are generally less for a whole year of publishing online content than producing a single newspaper.

Revenue Streams

There are some tested ways to make up for the operating costs of a new website. Depending on how advanced an online publication is will determine how much revenue it needs to generate. It will also establish which of these options are viable.

Advertisements are the simplest way of making money off a website. Traditional publications have them, and so can the online versions. Print and

broadcasts can offer separate advertisements for the website or bundle them as a package with the traditional forms. Local advertisers can take advantage of these bundles and get their product seen in multiple media.

Online publications can also use Google and other national companies to provide targeted ads. For example, Google's AdSense program provides banner advertisements that can run on a website. After signing up and logging into Google, a publication can determine the types of ads that will run on their site and what they will look like. As users view the online publication, advertising revenue is generated.

Photo reprint services can make use of photos the staff takes for traditional and online publications. Services like SmugMug allow people to upload photos, organize them, and sell prints to the world. This particular site is geared toward professional photographers, yet it is still very easy to use. It offers very detailed control over image quality, privacy, and price setting. Once set up, users just go to the website and view what photos are available. From there, they can order prints directly from the site. The staff does not have to do anything. The revenue generated can transfer automatically to a school account.

An online store is another option for not only making some money, but also advertising the publication's brand. Fans of the site, including other students, parents, and community members can shop for staff logo merchandise. Depending on the school district, the site may also be able to sell school-branded

spirit items. Shops like this can be set up for free on many sites, such as cafepress.com.

Changing the Approach to Staff Organization and Content Delivery

As students enter the professional world after high school and college, they will find that more is expected of them than ever before. Gone are the days when a journalist specializes in an area and does only that one thing. Now, reporters must be interviewers, photographers, camera operators, and more. Students must take with them a diverse skill set that will prepare them for working in a media-rich world. Training a staff to deliver news in an online format accomplishes this goal.

The best place to start is with staff organization. There may already be a good system in place for submitting stories and other content. It should be reevaluated to see how it meets the goals of a constantly updated website. There are online systems that make this process quite simple. Google Docs and Wiggio are two free services that are built for staff collaboration and file sharing. Using one of these, a staff can keep an always-updated library of stories and media files, sharing them only when they are ready to be published. They allow for an easy way to access files at home, offer feedback on stories to peers, and maintain a staff calendar.

By creating a website, a publication effectively becomes a 24/7 operation. Instead of reaching an audience on a weekly or monthly basis, users can now

interact with content at any time they wish. With this comes the expectation of constantly updated content available to view. Without that component, people will quickly lose interest in the site.

To meet this demand, a staff must look at its organizational structure. Instead of releasing all stories once a month as might be done for a print publication, a website can have this content scheduled for intermittent daily release. Just like a professional news site, users will be able to check in daily for a new feature. This may take some adjustments to the production calendar. Reporters may have to have story packages ready to go a couple weeks before they will even be published. But, this system will guarantee people will keep visiting the site.

This change in the publication cycle is something that daily, weekly, and monthly broadcasters and publishers are coming to terms with. The public wants news updates as soon as they are available, and other content that is of interest in between the big stories at regular intervals. This content does not need to be as fleshed out as full feature packages. This is where social networking sites like Twitter can be employed to give bare-bones facts, quick updates, links to stories, and game scores. This approach also gives students the opportunity to produce simple inverted pyramid type stories and briefs that are not often relevant in scholastic publications.

Marketing Considerations

A website should not exist in a vacuum. There cannot be an expectation that the intended audience will actively seek out an online scholastic publication simply because it exists. Like traditional forms, a staff must put considerable effort into making sure people know about it.

The most obvious way to get the word out about a new website is to go where there is already a large base of people. Students can create a fan page on Facebook and open an account on Twitter to promote new content that goes up on the publication website. Students can also promote the site individually on their personal accounts. Their status updates can include direct links to the articles so people do not have to put any work into seeking them out. Most people only check a few websites daily, usually including e-mail and social networks. This becomes an easy way to ensure updates are getting the attention of the right people.

For a small community such as a school, time-tested ways of promotion are also valuable. Word of mouth, posters, and the continuation of traditional media forms can help cross-promote what is happening online. In collaboration with the school district's technology department, school computers' homepages could be set to the online publication. The more ways that students can get the word out and promote the brand, the better the website will do.

Elements to Enhance the User Experience

Once decisions have been made about the type of website being created and how it is supported, the staff can turn attention to the type of content being offered. The key is thinking about what form makes the most sense for the message being delivered. Some stories and topics lend themselves better to the written word; others can be better portrayed through a person's unique voice. During the course of reporting, students can use multiple tools to create mixed media stories to appear on the Internet. Depending on the staff and the website, any and all of the following can be used to engage readers in ways traditional media cannot.

RSS Feeds

Much of the content that is available or can be created for use in an online publication originally exists on different websites. Luckily, there are tools on the Internet for simply linking and sharing this data between sites. The simplest form is called an RSS feed. This is a piece of code that is available on many websites that shares information with other websites about when there is new content available.

For example, an RSS feed can be used to link a Twitter account to an online publication's website. Assume a staff "tweets" scores from a basketball game. This information can be displayed on the front page of the publication's website. After initially subscribing to the account's RSS feed, each update that is

posted to Twitter can appear on the site's front page. This happens automatically, so the website can be updated dynamically.

RSS feeds are available for countless sites on the Internet. From the social networking system Facebook to the online bookmarking service Delicious, information can easily be shared between sites.

Embedded Content

A second way to get off-site material on a website is by using embedded content. Like an RSS feed, this is something that resides on another site. The difference is that embedded content does not constantly update the material like an RSS feed does. Sites generally embed rich media content, while an RSS feed is most often used for text data. Therefore, while you would link a website using an RSS feed for status updates from Facebook, you would embed a YouTube video on a page.

This is a powerful way to either use third-party sites to organize and host your content, or link to content that was created from other providers. Say a staff member writes a review of the latest episode of Saturday Night Live. Along with the review, a site could embed a video that is hosted on the NBC website that shows clips from the episode. Since the content is still hosted by its creator, there is no copyright infringement. Sites offer these links to cross-promote the content they are creating.

All of the services below offer ways of using RSS or embeddable code to serve the content on a separate website. Using these tools is an great way of extending the capabilities of a website without having to host a lot of extra material or deal with the technology issues associated with serving it.

Podcasts

A podcast is a simple way of sharing a radio broadcast, interview, or other audio footage with an audience any time they want to hear it. The podcast is simply an audio file, like an MP3, paired with a file written in the XML coding language that lets subscribers know when there is a new episode. It is just like subscribing to a regular newspaper, but instead of getting a paper on your doorstep, you get an MP3 file in your media player.

Though they can be coded by hand, there are many free and paid websites such as PodBean that do all of the legwork for you. This is an easy way to create some simple podcasts that can be embedded on your website. A producer records the audio, loads it on a computer, and uploads it to the website. From there, information about the topic, author, and date is entered. The podcast is then ready to publish and download.

For most beginners, a free account with a service will work fine for short files every now and then. As the feature becomes more popular, though, there may be interest in paying a little for advanced services. For example, the PodBean website charges about \$2.49 a month for an account with 1 GB of

storage compared to the free account's 100 MB, plus increased bandwidth. As the popularity of the website increases, a publication can consider increasing how much is spent on storage space and bandwidth, and at the same time tap into advertising opportunities through the service to help pay for those add-ons.

Video

Five years ago, it was not as easy to share video on the Internet. When YouTube launched in 2005, it brought a new standard to how content was stored and viewed online. This is due to advancements in storage technology, as it has become relatively cheap to store large files like video.

Publications can take advantage of YouTube and many other sites that offer similar services like Vimeo, SchoolTube, and Dailymotion. Using inexpensive video recorders, students can shoot, edit, and upload their videos to these sites. The content can then be shared on the website.

There are some limitations to sites that host video. Most take the original file and convert it to a different format. While this is not extra work for the producer, it may result in a lower quality version available for viewing. There are also time limits on the video. For example, YouTube only accepts videos that are ten minutes or less. While this may seem like a short amount of time, the reality is that most Internet users will not sit through a video longer than that. These limitations can help producers refine their packages and ensure they are telling a concise, powerful story.

Live Streaming

A different way of approaching video content is to host a live stream. This could be a useful tool for more closely representing a broadcast over the Internet. With sites like USTREAM, producers can directly input video feeds and broadcast them for anyone to see. The service also allows clips to be recorded and saved for on-demand applications.

Besides traditional talk shows, this type of service could be used for broadcasting events that are of relevance to the community. Instead of just reporting on a basketball game or school board meeting, the event could be streamed live for users to see. Paired with a written summary, analysis, and spectator reactions, this becomes a multimedia experience that the user helps control.

Photo Slideshows with Audio

Photography has long been a staple in print and video publications. The Internet gives photographers a chance to add sound and text to tell more complex stories with their images. Software like Soundslides can be used to take still photographs and an audio file to make a photo slideshow. The content can be hosted on a site or exported as a movie. From there, it can be linked back to the publications main site.

Blogs

Content management systems like WordPress were originally conceived as tools for hosting blogs. They have matured over time, but that basic function is still a vibrant part of many websites. A blog is simply a way of publishing information on the Internet. The content is published in chronological order, so the most recent entries are always featured at the top of a page.

Online publications find blog software useful to post story packages in different sections. Another use is for individual reporters or common topics. For example, a person might be interested in photography and read a blog that specializes in that topic. But, that blog might exist on a site that covers many technology-related topics. A scholastic publication can do the same thing by hosting multiple blogs for topics of interest to the audience. So, one can imagine a blog that tracks the progress of the high school football team or commentates on activities of the student government.

Comments

The Internet opens the possibility of having readers engage with the content in ways that they have never been able to before. Instead of having information that just flows one way, online publications make true discussions possible. If a site chooses to enable a “comments” section or discussion board, the audience can have a conversation at any time. This user-submitted content can extend the scope of the original story package, or raise ideas that were not

expressed elsewhere. This can lead to much more interaction than was previously possible in the days of letters to the editor.

Polls and User Submissions

There are even more ways to engage with users in the online world. Polls allow the audience to respond to a current topic, and can also be used as information in a separate story. Many content management systems like WordPress have simple poll abilities built in to their packages. For added control, sites like SurveyMonkey can be used to fine-tune the type of questions asked of readers, what types of responses are required, and to whom the access is available.

Online forms present an alternate way of collecting user data. This process is very similar to what is done by SurveyMonkey. Instead of passing out pieces of paper to get responses, a spreadsheet database can be setup using Google Docs. The software has a simple web interface for creating a form that people can be sent, to directly to give their input. This does not allow for people to see responses, so it is more useful for gathering data for a story.

Maps

Google offers an easy way to create maps that users can interact with. This tool, similar to what is offered by Mapquest and Yahoo!, allows producers to

plot points of interest for people to see. Multiple locations can be saved on a map, then shared on a publication's website for people to view or interact with.

This can be especially useful if a story references places that the general public may not know. The press is tasked with explaining stories so people understand them, and this can be an easy way of giving users a frame of reference for a story. The tool can also be used to show relations between places. For example, a story package may review the best restaurants in a town. The map can show all of these places, perhaps showing a concentration of good places to eat.

PDF Documents

Sharing the exact print version of an issue on the website is an easy way to continue the strong link between an online publication and the print version. Services like Issuu and Scribd not only allow users to upload PDF documents for free, but to also share them in a format that resembles what people experience when flipping through the physical product. These sites take the PDF documents and share them using a viewer that is right in the web browser. The audience does not even have to have software on their computer to view a PDF; everything is fully compatible without any special plug-ins or add-ons.

Besides sharing documents created by the staff, this can be an easy way of sharing primary source material for a story package. If a story runs that talks about the projected school budget for the coming year, the report from the school

board could be included as a supplement. People can easily access that document and find additional information that may be relevant to their specific area of interest.

CHAPTER 5

A MODEL PROGRAM

There are many ways that a publication can move into the online world, but is there a preferred method? Professional and scholastic publications have used different delivery tools in the past, but these competing approaches can be resolved. When deciding how to begin, a staff needs to keep the goals of the publication in mind, while recognizing the unique challenges of a scholastic setting.

One way to start an online program is by finding examples of what can be accomplished. This thesis includes a sample website which demonstrates the technologies that are referenced. It can be accessed at <http://whitingthesis.wordpress.com>. Besides showing these tools, it also features interviews with current teachers about their online technology use and links to examples of full scholastic programs. These sites serve as continuing resources, as they are setting the example for online scholastic journalism. The students and their advisers continually look for new tools to tell their stories. The leading scholastic sites feature ways of delivering content that are at least on par with, if not exceeding, those of professional publications.

Scholastic journalism organizations offer additional resources for building this type of program. For example, the Journalism Education Association has a digital media website available at <http://www.jeadigitalmedia.org>. It has articles and discussions that address an array of current issues that arise in the field. It is

a valuable starting point for new online publications to learn about specific tools, get advice, or see more examples of strong programs.

Each staff that creates an online presence will run into different challenges depending on the school culture, community support, existing journalism and broadcasting programs, and student interest. In a typical situation, this chapter will serve as a guide for creating an online scholastic publication. Students will be able to modify these suggestions to meet the needs of their unique situation.

Interface with School Staff

Though students produce the publication and they are the ones choosing the content, it is important to consider how school officials perceive the online product. Many of the challenges a staff may encounter are similar to the ones traditional student publications face. For example, the students might write a story that some parents do not want to hear about. This happened in Dexter, Michigan at Dexter High School in 2008. The student publication, *The Squall*, had a feature about dating and relationships. The cover mimicked a famous photo, depicting two students embracing on a bed. Some parents objected. A respectful relationship with the school board and administration can help defuse these types of conflicts before they arise or can ensure there is an authentic dialogue between all parties.

To help promote this rapport, the staff can regularly meet with the administration for press conferences and interviews. Offering the school's

principal a forum to express relevant news and events can help build a professional relationship. Reporters can also attend school board meetings. Covering these events may not be the most exciting task, but it will show the significance the student reporters place on delivering news that directly impacts their peers. Providing fair and accurate coverage throughout these types of stories will demonstrate a commitment to professional practices.

Establishing a working relationship is key, but the broader goal is for the administration to fully support responsible journalism instruction and a free student press. The staff needs to show reasons why their product is beneficial to the school. Besides the skills the students are learning, their work indirectly serves as a public relations tool. School districts are eager to promote their programs and encourage increased enrollment. Administrators can show off a student publication that has original writing, professional design, advanced technology use, beautiful photographs, and student-created advertisements.

With a well-crafted publication, students are bound to receive recognition that the school finds valuable. There are broadcast and press associations that award student work on the state and national levels. They give awards to individual students, as well as entire publications. A school may not have the most athletic football team or the smartest chess club, but an award-winning student publication can bring as much, if not more, positive publicity.

There must also be consideration given to a school district's technology department. Often, this group unilaterally makes decisions on what material is

appropriate for student viewing. This leads to many sites being blocked because they have e-mail access, social media components, or image search features. Some of these restrictions may affect content for an online student publication if a blocked site hosts it. This may also impair the ability of students to view their own publication on school computers.

Ideally, the technology department will have an open policy to Internet access at school. This should be developed in cooperation with the administration, school board, faculty, and students. It is then up to the students and teachers to ensure material accessed online is appropriate for school viewing. If this is not the philosophy of the “technology gatekeepers,” students can outline specific benefits of allowing access to certain sites. For example, the photo site Flickr has image search functions, some of which may be inappropriate for school viewing. A student publication can make the case that the benefits of photo storage and organization on this site outweigh the potential negatives that a school might encounter from using it. Clear, logical arguments can go a long way in persuading the right people to allow access to sites. It is up to the teachers to instruct students how to use them effectively and responsibly.

Digital Workflow

The most successful online student publications change the entire way the editor-in-chief hands out reporting assignments, writers turn in copy, proofreaders review the information, and editors publish story packages. By employing more

forms of content, increased organization is required to keep track of all the elements being produced for delivery. The best way to do this is by using an online system such Google Docs or Wiggio to manage every element being submitted. They offer organizational tools for storing files; scheduling deadlines and meetings; and maintaining privacy.

A print publication takes a traditional approach to the publication cycle. It starts with a staff holding a brainstorming meeting. Then, stories are assigned to writers, and they submit their rough drafts. Photographers are assigned photos and editors mock up page designs. On a set date, all of the material comes in, and editors insert it in the appropriate place. The final product arrives, and the staff distributes it to the audience. This standard has worked well in the past, but the structure must change to include an online product. Otherwise, there would be no time for the staff to update the website.

On the digital front, Google provides a wide range of document sharing tools that a staff can use to organize its material. This becomes important as the print publication uses some stories and the online version uses other packages. Staff writers can share documents they write online with the editorial staff, then an editor can make revisions for the final draft. The staff writer can make those changes, then resubmit the package. Once in the definitive form, the editor can publish the submission. This system rids the publications room of mass confusion over where papers are, questions about who is writing a story, and problems with editing material. As a staff increases in size, this organization

becomes even more important if multiple classes are contributing content for the publications.

This type of organization has proven effective. Students at Haslett High School in Haslett, Michigan have used this system. Their print and online publication, The Viking Longboat, is organized using Google Docs. This is particularly beneficial to their program because students from multiple classes submit material for the publication. Editors in the production class are able to collect everything digitally, edit, and then publish the story packages.

For rich media, any of the popular photo and video sites such as Flickr and Picasa can host files for approval before they are published. As with written works, it is imperative to have a set process in place for editorial control of the final product. Staff writers now submit written material, photos, audio files, videos, and other rich media for a story package. Still, the content must still be cleared for publishing like it is in the traditional form. There are more options available for a particular piece of content's form, but that does not diminish the importance of maintaining journalistic integrity.

There is a significant argument to be made for using these offsite systems as much as possible for storing publication files. Most technology departments have the capability to offer network storage solutions for publications to use. While this may be convenient, it introduces an additional layer between the staff and the content. The network might become unavailable or unauthorized people could gain access to the information. In the news world,

this could be disastrous. Reporters go through many revisions before a finished story package comes out. The potential of prying eyes looking at what a staff is working on makes an off-site host much more attractive.

Promoting Value

Ensuring that the students value the online product as much as the traditional form is the most important aspect of reorganizing a staff in this way. In the past, most online student publications have been secondary to the print or broadcast version. Changing the workflow to encompass both forms can help show the value of this new way of communicating. Deadlines are staggered so new content is constantly being put on the website. This is done at Carmel High School in Carmel, Indiana. Students are able to schedule out new content for the HiLite Online to come out every day using this type of system.

Once this is implemented, students will realize they are interacting with a larger audience than they did with the traditional form in ways that were not previously possible. Instead of being a second-class dumping ground for old and irrelevant news, the online publication becomes a competitive hub for student information.

Getting Started with Equipment

An actual website for an online publication does not cost much, if anything, to get started. Of course, the cost will increase as features and content are

added, but there are significant things that can be accomplished without having to spend a penny. The most significant obstacle for some programs will be acquiring the equipment necessary to produce this content.

There are many options for finding tools that students can use to take great photos, capture clear audio, and record interesting video segments. As these technologies have become more cost effective for consumers over the last decade, many tools have been discarded in favor of higher-quality, cheaper alternatives. Now, it is very easy to purchase an initial package of equipment for students to use at a modest cost. In fact, many students may already have a camera, cell phone, or video recorder that can be used to fit the bill.

Before running to the store and depleting the budget, it is good to assess what tools are already available to use. Many journalism and broadcasting programs have existing equipment that can be used directly or adapted to fit the needs of the online publication. After all, a camera manufactured 40 years ago can still take high quality photos. With the aid of a scanner, those prints can easily be put online. Or, a video camera that shoots on tape can deliver online content with the proper conversion hardware. It is a matter of seeing what tools are in good working order and determining if it makes more sense financially to adapt those tools for modern use or buy newer, cheaper models.

A staff can also look to other sources in the school or community. Some districts may have equipment in an art program or media center that students can use. This is an enticing opportunity, but it likely has strings attached. Without

dedicated equipment for a publication staff, reporters might find themselves in situations where others are using the tools that they need to cover a story. Or, material could accidentally be left on a recorder where someone else could see an unfinished product.

For many programs, the best-case scenario involves finding any existing equipment dedicated to the program that is still useful, and then purchasing some used equipment to fill in the gaps. High quality, reasonably priced equipment can be found at garage sales and websites like Craigslist, Amazon, and other major electronic retailers. If the community and parents already support the program, it may also be appropriate to ask for donations of old equipment for staff use.

A Strong Staff

An online scholastic publication's staff determines the quality of the end product. Without responsible reporting that is relevant to the audience, students will not find any value in engaging with the site. Therefore, it becomes imperative to recruit and maintain a strong staff of students who will rise to the responsibility that comes with a free student press.

Teachers and members of the staff can recruit new members each year who specialize and excel in multiple disciplines. This not only provides for balanced coverage of the student body, but also ensures that knowledgeable people will be heading up the individual elements of a student publication.

Students who see themselves as photographers, designers, writers, and businessmen can all come together to work toward a common goal.

While it is important to have specialization, a modern journalism and broadcast program must train every student to be comfortable reporting in multiple forms. A student may see himself as only a writer, but that one-dimensional job description rarely exists in the professional world. It is important for that writer to learn the basics of photocomposition, video editing, and online content delivery. Using this enhanced skill set, the student will be in a position to better contribute to the student publication. In a broader sense, that student will also have the skills necessary to be successful in the world after high school.

CONCLUSION

A scholastic publication has numerous benefits for students. It is a training ground for creating media-literate individuals, and it is a tool for making cross-curricular connections. These central goals of modern education are touched upon in many classes, but journalism education is uniquely focused on engaging students with this content. An online publication brings technology integration to the forefront of the learning experience. Young people learn to interpret and use modern tools in responsible ways. The lessons they take from these activities will help them as they set out for the next stages in their lives, from college, to jobs, to educating the next generation of citizens.

Schools also see benefits from including online journalism and broadcasting in a curriculum. Multiple state standards are met and/or exceeded through the normal operations of a news staff. As national and state funds become more closely linked with demonstrated student achievement on standardized tests, these programs become more essential. They also have an indirect effect of serving as a school's community outreach. Though the content is determined and produced by students, the material presented gives family, friends, and the community unparalleled insight into the lives of young people.

For those students interested in entering the professional world of journalism, this training is invaluable. The skills they take with them are the skills they will need to be competitive in the industry. Newspaper and broadcast operations are tightening their budgets and seeking more diverse skills from their

new employees. These young people will be at the top of the candidate pool as the old guard retires and fresh talent steps in to continue the responsibilities of a free press.

Scholastic publications can take many approaches to meet these goals. To get online, a staff can start with a basic product at minimal cost. As the program flourishes, the students can expand sections depending on commitment and available revenue. Compared to a traditional publication, this may even bring more value for the money spent, while staying current on important trends that students notice.

Schools that want to begin this type of program do not have to make a staggering investment. The tools to deliver rich content are readily available for reasonable prices. A staff does need to consider how they are storing and organizing their data. It is important to keep their publication's material separate from what a school district may make available to the general student population.

Above all else, student journalists must remember that the reports they are delivering are just as important as their traditional print and broadcast counterparts. With that benefit comes the responsibility to maintain the same journalistic integrity and editorial control as they would with traditional news stories. The Internet offers many advantages that print, radio, and television cannot offer. Students will use these experiences with delivering content over this medium to become responsible journalists and members of society.

FURTHER RESEARCH

There are additional areas that may be explored to help fully understand how online scholastic publications can be beneficial for students. One area not covered in this thesis is the mobile market. While many of the technologies discussed can be viewed on portable devices, it is unknown how additional attention to mobile-specific devices could aid in the branding of a publication. As more people use an increasingly varied range of devices to access the Internet, it would be worthwhile to determine which ones are the most prevalent.

Once more school news outlets make the move to the online world, it would be good to follow up to see how this has affected their program. Of particular interest are benefits to the students' academic progress due to the increased skill set they possess from publishing online. There may be other significant benefits to a publication's finances and relations with the surrounding community.

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