



Center for Social Media

Scan and Analysis of Best Practices in Digital Journalism Both Within and Outside U.S. Public Broadcasting

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Principal Investigator: Pat Aufderheide

Investigators: Jessica Clark, Matthew C. Nisbet, Carin Dessauer

Research Associate: Katie Donnelly

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In this report, researchers at American University's Center for Social Media identify a set of best practices in digital new media journalism intended to guide planning and initiatives in this area specifically for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) and more broadly for the Public Service Media community in the US. We offer an overview of the current journalism and public broadcasting environments, derived from a scan of recent reports and interviews with relevant experts, along with a set of identified best practices, bolstered with analysis of specific examples that could be replicated by public media producers.

Methodology:

We developed an initial list of best practices in digital journalism after a considered examination of recent relevant reports, publications and conference proceedings, and then conducted hour-long interviews with ten experts—thought leaders, innovators, practitioners and researchers—who are examining a broad range of digital journalism projects and outlets. In evaluating the results of these interviews, we examined the transcripts for consistencies and commonalities in recommendations, key criteria, and emerging trends, comparing these interview results to the conclusions of relevant reports. Finally, we asked these experts to assess the best practices we identified, and further refined them based on their feedback.

Best practice categories identified:

- **Involve:** Journalism projects are using digital platforms to serve and involve users by providing the information, motivation, and tools for the user to participate in current affairs debates and related online/offline communities.
- **Go deeper:** News and public affairs outlets are taking advantage of digital platforms to add depth and context to coverage of breaking news, events, and issues. Digital journalism projects are also sustaining and expanding core public affairs specializations such as investigative reporting, international news, or science and environmental coverage—specialty beats that commercial news organizations are otherwise cutting.
- **Reach new and non-traditional publics:** Digital platforms are making it possible for producers to engage with more focused networks of users who share common identities, problems, issues or interests, rather than following a model that dictates coverage that appeals to a mass audience. Importantly, this creates openings for informing and engaging minority, ethnic, and low-income publics that are often underserved by mainstream coverage—a core mission for public broadcasters. In turn, such perspectives and content can migrate to broader platforms, diversifying coverage and providing valuable context for more general constituencies.
- **Repurpose, remix, recycle:** Repurposing existing content online can include shifting content from one platform to another, or the aggregation of existing news and data sources around particular issues. Such projects maximize user access to existing content and create new value and utility for users through smart curation.

- **Collaborate:** Collaborative digital news and public affairs projects are being organized around shared issues, locations and user communities. These projects involve connections between different sorts of media outlets as well as related organizations, institutions, and publics.
- **Enable media literacy:** Digital journalism is not just about effective use of technology or organizational restructuring. It also involves helping users to take advantage of the abundance of new media resources and choices, to become more frequent and more effective makers and users. This category includes examples of projects featuring news and media literacy, standards-setting and training to become citizen journalists.
- **Play with form to innovate and integrate new technologies:** Digital journalism pioneers are innovating new formats, interfaces, and platforms for delivering news and information and for sponsoring audience engagement with public affairs. In some cases these piggyback on commercial open platforms and software; in others they leverage free open source software and related developer communities.
- **Promote political discussion and participation:** Digital journalism sites are well poised to foster political conversations and civic engagement, whether they are election-centered or policy-centered, partisan or not. Political sites tend to encourage and even rely upon user comments that can sometimes turn into rigorous discussions that inspire people to take action. These sites also provide so-called “mobilizing information” on how to get involved, who to contact, and where to show up to participate or vote. Political conversations are also stimulated by government transparency initiatives.

We close this report by providing a discussion of issues of scale in applying best practices, and a recommendation of two areas for further study: emerging business models and impact measurement for digital journalism.

II. SHIFTS IN THE NEWS ENVIRONMENT

Much has been written about the impact of digital technologies on journalism outlets and practices. Here we offer a brief overview that provides context for our analysis.

Over the past decade, shifts in demographics, technology and audience expectations have fundamentally changed the nature of journalism. The new era of digital media is defined by a sea change in who controls information flow—from the sender (yesterday’s mass media) to the user (yesterday’s audience member). The convergence of previously separate print, broadcast, and discussion platforms; the rise of tools that make digital media creation and manipulation easy; and the expansion of online and mobile distribution have transformed the nature of news, punditry, and public debate. These shifts have made it possible for everyone to be not only a consumer of media but also a creator, to not be only a receiver but a selector, recommender, participant or curator.

Since the costs of production and barriers to entry are lower, more content is being produced, more content is simultaneously available, and opportunities for media consumption and interaction are expanding dramatically. Devices have multiplied: video screens are now in every room; message receivers and transmitters appear on appliances from toothbrushes to thermostats to mobile phones—all potentially hooked into ever-expanding networks.

The rise of mobile technology

The Apple iPhone has served as a harbinger of capabilities and habits to come, allowing users to both post and download text, audio, video, photos, videos, games and applications (“apps”) that amongst many other things, serve up news streams.¹ Now, a new wave of devices supported by open source protocols, such as the free OS platform Google Android, are swiftly coming to market, further accelerating the pace of innovation and adoption by giving consumers more choices. Such mobile devices have begun to erase familiar coverage boundaries imposed by the limitations of print distribution and terrestrial broadcast. Mobile content can just as easily be local (even automatically for a traveler when enabled by GPS) as it can be international. By 2020, it’s projected that the world’s people will use mobile devices as their primary tool for connecting to the Internet.² In places like Asia and Europe, mobile is already a strong communication force.³ Low-cost “netbooks ”⁴ now provide yet another option for media consumers looking to cheaply access online content and cloud computing applications.

Emerging habits for news consumers

News consumers are changing their habits in response to these new technologies. The 2009 State of the News Media Report chronicles this shift in behavior, summarizing 2008 survey data that finds that 62% of all American adults had connected to the Internet with wireless technology, 58% had used their cell phone or personal digital assistant for things other than talking; and 41% had logged onto the Internet away from home or office with a handheld devices or laptop computer. Many people, of course, had made connections in multiple ways. In addition, this report from the Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism cites 2008 Nielsen Mobile research that tracks 40 million active users of the mobile web—representing approximately one-fourth of the 160 million American adults using the Internet.⁵

The “people formerly known as the audience”⁶ are also taking on new roles, as participants, critics, and collaborators. “Findability”⁷ is paramount in a media environment in which the first line of user participation is choosing what content to access. Users have many new tools for finding broadcast content, including search engines, “favorites” lists, and interactive program guides.⁸ TiVo recorders, video-on-demand, podcasting, and online video sources such as Hulu and YouTube mean that fewer audience members engage in “appointment media”⁹ time with television or radio. Instead, they are timeshifting their use based on convenience. Loyalty to particular news brands may be diluted by access to both new news sources and recommendations by social network peers. Motivated users also now have the ability to easily graze a diversity of sources, following an issue or event across national or international outlets and within or across ideological viewpoints.

While these technologies dramatically boost user access and control, they also shift the nature of media reach and penetration. The mass audience for particular outlets or stations is dwindling as audiences move to the Internet for their news.¹⁰ Emerging in the place of mass audiences are groups of engaged users with common interests who expect high-quality content, the power to respond and to create, and the ability to sort, curate and recommend. These should not be understood as “niche” or “long tail”¹¹ audiences—segments of a larger audience to be marketed to. Instead they should be understood as connected communities of active individuals often with their own unique culture, communication norms, and aesthetic preferences.

The switch from a mass audience to multiple networked user groups impacts the distribution and viewing of public affairs programming. Outlets, journalists and news producers now need fresh strategies for reaching individuals who lack a strong motivation or preference for public affairs content. A traditional strategy was to include popular entertainment and lifestyle content with public affairs coverage. However, with an abundance of competing channels, platforms and content choices, it’s now much easier to narrowcast entertainment, sports, or celebrity culture—in the process leeching away the wider audience for public affairs coverage.

The rise of partisan sources for news and commentary—most notably high-profile left-and right-leaning blogs, but also a range of new options for radio and cable—creates a different but related challenge to broadcast news producers. Such outlets, which privilege a particular political viewpoint, compete with both public and commercial journalism projects to attract the most politically active audience members. Partisan news outlets can heighten political engagement, but at the cost of reinforcing ideology through conflict-driven journalism that diminishes context, balance and constructive debate.¹²

All of this means that motivated, already well-informed listeners and viewers have new opportunities to become ever more information rich. The wider audience, however, if they lack a strong preference for public affairs content, can literally tune out the news.

New habits for news producers

The digital evolution also presents challenges for journalists, in many cases altering or replacing traditional norms and criteria that guide how they approach news production. For news and public media producers, the shift from mass audiences to networked users redoubles the importance of both building meaningful issue-focused communities to link

content with users, and tracking the impact of such efforts^{13,14}. This also creates the opportunity to provide more transparency about how they make the news for audiences that are interested in both information and process.

Building a network of engaged users requires a different set of behaviors and norms than producing print or broadcast coverage. To stay on top of a story, beat and daily reporters must now keep pace with the participatory 24/7 experience of news consumers. Instead of trying to produce a perfect “final” product daily, weekly, or monthly, journalists working online must now optimize their standards to produce new content on a near-constant cycle. This shift from the mentality of a “final product” to a “work in progress” (or several smaller works over the course of a day) also means anticipating and embracing the fact that the content will be immediately commented upon, repurposed or enhanced by users.

For some organizations, such immediacy lessens the value and duration of exclusives or scoops in reporting. Instead, in the cable news and Internet driven 24/7 news cycle, journalists attempt to synthesize their own reporting as well as that of others’ on an ongoing and updated basis. As Jan Schaffer, Executive Director of J-Lab: The Institute for Interactive Journalism aptly described: “News now takes the form of ‘here is what we know now, here is what we would like to know, and what do you know as a consumer, what can you add?’ ”

Such a shift provides new opportunities for professional journalists to interact with users who are not professionally trained as journalists, engaging them in “crowdsourced”¹⁵ investigation, factchecking, story recommendation and more. Such “pro-am”¹⁶ collaborations break down the gatekeeping roles of journalists and editors, but do not necessarily mean that quality or trust is reduced. Instead, by establishing shared standards and contexts for online news production, news organizations can build alliances with users that bring outside skills and expertise in to help produce, maintain and monitor high-quality reporting.

As more journalists move online, and more citizen journalists move into news production, serious questions emerge about the ethics of online communication. This spring, a rash of news outlets issued statements on how reporters should behave vis-à-vis social networking platforms. “Assume that your professional life and your personal life merge online regardless of your care in separating them. Don’t write or post anything that would embarrass the *LAT* or compromise your ability to do your job,” advised the *Los Angeles Times*. The *Wall Street Journal* warned reporters not to “friend” confidential sources, use false names online when reporting, round friends and family up to recommend stories, or engage in flame wars about pieces.¹⁷

New technologies and formats are transforming the definition and routines of producing journalism in other important ways. Many digital formats and topic- or event-based packages for news stray from the traditional daily reporter’s focus on violence, conflict, and personality, and instead strive to add depth and context to coverage. A renewed emphasis on transparency and accuracy¹⁸—enforced by the vocal online users who now serve as ad hoc media critics across the web—also challenges the simplified conventions of objectivity that have dominated political reporting over the past three decades.¹⁹ Many online reporters, bloggers and commentators eschew “objectivity” defined as proportional balance between

two sides, particularly in cases where the preponderance of expertise and evidence rests in one direction.²⁰

As we detail in several examples in this report, digital platforms are also providing a new home for veteran beat reporters, especially as news organizations cut their specialists in areas such as foreign affairs, investigative, science, medical, and environmental reporting. Such journalists often are joined online by experts such as scientists or economists who are taking advantage of digital tools to establish themselves as “public scholar” content creators and arbiters. In this sense, journalists are joining their former main sources as co-creators of content.

Upheavals in the news business

All of these changes are radically reshaping the news business. Subscriber bases and advertising revenues for newspapers are shrinking, and with them staffs and “news holes”²¹—despite the fact that more users than ever are accessing this content online.²² In the first half of 2009, a number of high-profile newspapers folded or radically shrunk, increasing widespread panic about the “death of journalism,”²³ and prompting Congressional hearings on possible newspaper bailouts.

Other outlets for news and information are also facing major transitions, not all negative. Blogs and online journalism projects are attracting new users, funders and advertisers, and individual journalists are developing powerful online brands. Local radio and television news broadcasts, already diminished by waves of media consolidation and shareholder pressure, are further threatened by the atomization of user attention across screens and sites, but stations are reporting increased online audiences. Hoping to fill a vacuum of local news coverage, a number of citizen journalists and online developers have pioneered new forms of local and hyperlocal reporting; notably, the Knight Foundation is underwriting research and innovation in this space and there are several cities where well-developed online organizations are operating, many sourcing their stories to broadcast outlets. The marketplace for documentary film—a key resource for users seeking deep engagement with topics and a longtime staple of public broadcasting—has diversified, with filmmakers forging direct distribution and outreach relationships with users, experimenting with free and download-to-own online broadcast platforms, and connecting with distributors who broker deals with emerging cable channels and subscription services.²⁴ Below, in the Business Models section, we provide a summary of new approaches for supporting digital and cross-platform news production.

Digital news and public affairs content has evolved from being viewed as a marketing vehicle for an established legacy platform to being a critical distribution platform in and of itself and also as a way to extend the legacy brand. Early on, digital journalism was created separately from the legacy side of traditional broadcast outlets. As technology and the business environment have evolved, successful digital and cross-platform efforts have resulted from strategic coordinated efforts. The strongest digital journalism is the result of cross-platform strategy and planning that leverages content and resources and, at the same time, creates unique and innovative content that highlights the digital technology and the strengths of that news organization. Such cross-platform projects start by recognizing what the digital audience wants—how to best engage publics in both current events and shared issues through a combination of reporting, analysis and debate.

III. SHIFTS IN THE PUBLIC BROADCASTING ENVIRONMENT

The governance, funding and mission of public broadcasting institutions are different from those of commercial news institutions. Below we provide a brief analysis of transformations within this sector as they relate to the provision of news and current affairs programming.

Public broadcasters are suffering the same challenges as commercial broadcasters. But public broadcasting has an advantage, in that the overall brand has a high trust factor, and there is potential for community connection via local stations. Disruptions in the commercial environment for journalism offer public broadcasters and stations many different opportunities to experiment with repositioning their role in the community to become participants in—as well as makers and connectors of—networks of sources, subject area experts, and concerned users, all addressing both breaking and long-simmering news topics.

In doing so, public broadcasters could revisit the linked missions that they have adopted over the past four decades: to cultivate localism, to provide access to high-quality information to all citizens, to educate and enrich, and to provide a trusted space for showcasing diverse voices and perspectives. Public broadcasting services, stations, funders, program services, and independent producers are all taking a close look at the foundational language of their organizations in order to re-imagine their work in a digital, participatory environment.

Challenges to re-imagining news and public affairs services, with public broadcasting at the center, lie in two primary areas: the content generation side, and the distribution side. In content generation, the leading challenge is to reconfigure a business model for the major program services. For instance, at the moment, NPR, PRI and APM, all providers of important and innovative news and public affairs, all depend upon dues or licensing fees paid by stations. At the same time, they are all trying to get their programming on all emerging platforms, most of which are not limited by terrestrial broadcast signals. As users come to regard program services as divorced from local sources, stations become less interested in paying high premiums to rebroadcast content produced by the program services and more interested in using the leverage they have to limit the services' digital distribution options. The relative paucity of news and public affairs programs for television, in comparison with radio, is also a challenge, and the same business-model challenges apply.

Obstacles also occur at the level of the station. Stations reach into almost every community in the U.S., and already work loosely with each other. They could, hypothetically, become a core network of public media 2.0, with news and public affairs as a signature element. Such a network would have the strikingly valuable feature of having a built-in national presence and brand, while having intensely local presence and relationships. Stations across the country could earn an indispensable position within both the local media landscape and the local civil society, even as traditional mass media is reconfigured and traditional outlets wither. News and public affairs would be a key element of such a service, along with other staples such as television's children's programming and radio's innovative musical and talk show formats.

However, it is unclear now whether within public broadcasting stations there is wide interest in playing such a role. Such a role would be dramatically different from the one currently

played by most local stations. Stations would be repositioned as active shapers of media content and experience, cultivating high-touch local relationships using both national-level, highly-produced media and participatory media and communication generated by users. Such activities would include curating high-quality news and information; working with users on participatory platforms to shape and generate high-quality pro-am coverage; and engaging publics around shared civic problems.

Leaders at the local and national level within the decentralized community of public broadcasting have repeatedly raised the challenge of re-imagining public broadcasting's role as a national news service, and some daring experiments have been tried. But any wholesale shift in relationships would require coordinated strategic planning and joint action—both within public broadcasting and among allied outlets, foundations, and public-minded organizations—to survive and thrive at any scale.

One widely perceived obstacle might be less daunting than it seems. Discussions with media makers and executives both inside and outside of public broadcasting reveal a widespread assumption that the CPB is authorized only to support infrastructure and initiatives related to broadcast content. But not only does this legislative language underscore the importance of serving both local and national information needs through outreach, it supports the provision of “public telecommunications services through all appropriate available telecommunications distribution technologies.”²⁵ So, major change in legislation might not be necessary for CPB if stations throughout the country supported a shared mission to serve as the vehicle for building and funding a new digital network for public media 2.0.

Below, in the Best Practices and Examples section, we explore specific public broadcasting projects that demonstrate new practices in digital journalism. Here we provide a brief overview of new approaches within the sector.

National developments

Despite concerns by the stations that providing online and mobile access to popular national programs will draw users away, the national services have begun to dabble in digital content distribution, with news/public affairs programming making up a significant portion of what's on offer.

National Public Radio (NPR) has been particularly aggressive on this front over the past year, opening up its applications programming interface (API), which allows for online users to repackaging NPR content online; calling for “distributed distribution” by both stations and users;²⁶ and acquiring Public Interactive, a service which offers online content management tools for station websites. Hired in January, NPR President and CEO Vivian Schiller has picked up the ball on digital distribution by supporting the creation of a national news network that will serve up NPR's most popular programs alongside local news from stations.²⁷ This vision is represented in NPR's recently redesigned site—which allows users to “localize” their NPR home page, presenting local station streams, schedules and podcasts alongside national coverage—and in its Argo project, which encourages stations to submit proposals for deeper online news coverage on specialized topics.²⁸

The Public Radio Exchange (PRX) has led a number of new efforts to push public radio content out beyond broadcast outlets. As of early May the Public Radio Tuner²⁹—an iPhone app that allows users to stream public radio station content from NPR, Public Radio

International (PRI), American Public Media (APM) and stations around the country—had been downloaded 1.5 million times. Renamed the Public Radio Player 2.0, an updated version of the popular app was released in July, offering station schedules and on-demand streaming.³⁰ PRX has also served as a pipeline for bringing independent and citizen media into public broadcasting using digital tools. The PRX site offers users online access to a wide range of independent content (available to stations to rebroadcast for a fee) and has secured an XM channel on which independent content will be broadcast.³¹ So far, little of this content includes news or public affairs, although some radio documentary is in the mix.

On the television side, PBS has been much slower to adapt to online distribution, and is still focusing largely on repackaging content rather than interacting with users. The PBS Engage site³² offers a gallery of PBS social media projects, including an interesting history of evolution of user engagement on PBS.org.³³ Not all of these projects are related to journalism or public affairs, but they do serve as useful experiments for assessing online user engagement efforts. In April, PBS launched PBS Video,³⁴ a user-friendly online portal offering full-length episodes of PBS programs, including signature news and current affairs shows: *Frontline*, *NewsHour*, and *NOVA scienceNOW*.

Producers of these programs have also been experimenting with online platforms. Last year, *Frontline* had scored some earlier buzz³⁵ with its online distribution of *Bush's War*, a documentary examining the launch and evolution of the Iraq invasion, along with related digital features such as a video timeline.³⁶ In May, the *NewsHour with Jim Leher* announced that it would change its name and format to embrace digital distribution opportunities. Newly dubbed the *PBS NewsHour*, the program will merge on-air and online operations, offer regular online video updates, and collaborate with other public media content producers, both local and national.³⁷

The CPB has been supporting experiments in online news as well. The CPB-funded Independent Television Service (ITVS) serves as an innovation space for public media producers experimenting with current affairs programming across a range of formats, from immersive games to online maps to short online video and beyond. ITVS makes feature-length documentaries available across several digital platforms, including Hulu, SnagFilms, Zune and Xbox.³⁸ Cross-platform and cross-outlet collaboration is a particular focus of recent CPB grants, including support for multiplatform coverage of the economic crisis that involves both national players and stations³⁹, and multimedia journalistic collaborations among stations that deepen coverage on a particular topic.⁴⁰

Station-level experiments

Many public radio and television stations are struggling to catch up to new digital journalism, engagement and distribution practices. The recent economic downturn has raised the threat level for a number of already vulnerable stations, which cannot support significant local services beyond acting as repeaters for national content.

The PubForge Open Source Collaboration Survey⁴¹ polled public broadcasting station staff, producers and developers to assess the adoption of open source software tools for managing station sites. Responses indicated that staff and resources for web development are limited, but provided a wishlist of features for public broadcasting sites, including user-customizable home pages, improved search capabilities, social networking tools, membership

management, aggregation tools and features for simultaneously featuring local and national content.

In *All That Twitters is Not Gold*⁴², PRX presents an assessment of public radio stations' online engagement strategies. "Stations have decided that the web is critical to their future and critical to their public service mission, but they are still searching for ways to translate high-level aspirations into workable strategies and implementation," writes Jake Shapiro, who co-authored the presentation. *The Public Radio News Director's Guide*⁴³ offers on-the-ground advice to news producers, noting "Many broadcast stations have stopped referring to themselves as 'public radio' and now say 'public media.' By default then, we must be changing from 'public radio journalists' to 'public media journalists.' What this means years from now is unknown, but the signposts point to a place beyond sound, favoring a mix of all media." The same could be said for the television stations; convergence is the order of the day, with sites in the major markets, like Northern California's KQED⁴⁴, serving up a mix of video, audio, print and interactive content.

Stations are approaching this mix in different ways when it comes to news. Some, like Oregon Public Broadcasting, are positioning themselves as one-stop-shops for local, national and international reporting, in some cases from sources outside of public broadcasting.⁴⁵ Others, like Public Broadcasting Atlanta⁴⁶, hope to engage users in civic issues via community social networks. Partnering with universities, as WPSU in Central Pennsylvania did with its election coverage, offers student support for new approaches.⁴⁷ St. Louis station KETC has drawn much attention for its multi-platform outreach project, Facing the Mortgage Crisis.⁴⁸ While observers are calling for public broadcasting to fill in the gaps left by failing local news outlets, most stations lack the resources to support comprehensive reporting on community or regional issues. But new hybrid experiments have begun. For instance, in Seattle a number laid-off reporters from the *Post-Intelligencer*, which ceased print production in March, have found a new home at public television station KCTS. They are currently reporting online at SeattlePostGlobe.org, billed as "Seattle News 2.0."⁴⁹

Many questions remain about how national public broadcasting organizations and local stations will evolve, and if it is possible to generate meaningful and/or replicable collaborations within the sector. The best practices and examples below offer models and lessons for reporters, producers and outlets.

III. BEST PRACTICES AND EXAMPLES

Methodology

Although the nature of technology, audiences, and journalism itself continues to change, recent reports (noted in our bibliography) begin to suggest a set of emerging best practices, principles, and norms that can guide how public broadcasting outlets and producers adapt to the digital landscape.

“Best practices” is more than a buzz phrase. In any professional sector or industry, researchers commonly identify a set of activities, principles, themes, norms, or routines that appear to aid industry members in meeting common challenges or achieving shared goals. Best practices are intended to be generalizable across organizations and settings, though the decision to adopt any recommended activity will depend on the needs, resources, and goals of a particular organization.

Our research process included multiple stages. In the first stage, the identification of these activities was based on a review of existing reports and literature; primary research involving a qualitative analysis of leading websites, and conversations with leading experts who study digital journalism. Armed with initial best practice categories, we then expanded the scope of our investigation, examining and reviewing a broader range of media sites and digital journalism activities while also completing hour-long interviews with a total of ten thought leaders, innovators, and researchers who are examining a variety of digital journalism projects and outlets. These experts included:

- Bill Densmore, Director, Media Giraffe Project, University of Massachusetts. Media Giraffe is an effort to find and spotlight individuals making sustainable, innovative use of media (old and new) to foster participatory democracy and community.
- Amy Eisman, Director of Writing Programs, American University School of Communication. A consultant to top media organizations on content and web writing, Eisman was an editor with Gannett and *USA Today* for 17 years and then managing editor for programming at AOL.
- Mark Glaser, Executive Editor, PBS’ *MediaShift: A Guide to the Media Revolution*. Glaser is a longtime freelance journalist covering the Internet and media technology.
- Chuck Lewis, Distinguished Journalist in Residence, American University School of Communication. Lewis is the Founder of the Center for Public Integrity and, more recently, the Investigative Reporting Workshop.
- Jane McDonnell, Executive Director, Online News Association
- Andrew Nachison, President and CEO of iFocus: Institute for the Connected Society. iFocus is a think tank that helps individuals and organizations use media and communications technologies for innovation and social change.
- Lee Rainie, Director, Pew Internet & American Life Project
- Tom Rosenstiel, Director, Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism
- Jan Schaffer, Executive Director, J-Lab: The Institute for Interactive Journalism
- Kinsey Wilson, Senior Vice President and General Manager, NPR Digital Media

We asked each for details of their particular area of research, current or emerging best practices in digital journalism and public affairs, and recommendations for successful news projects and outlets. In evaluating the results of these interviews, we have examined the transcripts for consistencies and commonalities in recommendations, key criteria, and emerging trends, comparing these interview results to the conclusions of relevant recent reports.

We then followed up by asking our experts to respond to a set of proposed best practice categories using a web-based, open-ended survey instrument. This method was designed to ensure that our conclusions reflect a level of consensus among our interviewed experts and innovators and as a mechanism for soliciting additional qualitative feedback.

Below, we present eight categories of best practice in new media journalism that are directly relevant to the mission and goals of public broadcasting. The specifics of how a particular digital technology or medium achieves these principles are represented in the range of contemporary examples that we provide. “Profiles in Practice” spotlight innovative individual projects, illuminating trends and possibilities. Many of the projects we include fit into more than one best practice category; as such, we have coded for secondary categories in the table in the appendix.

For each best practice category, we include relevant examples from the public broadcasting community, non-profit organizations, commercial media outlets, and citizen media projects.

1. Involve

Journalism projects are using digital platforms to serve and involve users by providing the information, motivation, and tools to participate in debates about current affairs issues and related online/offline communities.

Media are no longer being produced solely for passive audiences but rather for active users. Innovative formats and norms for digital journalism are likely to be very effective at delivering “mobilizing knowledge” to citizens, directing users where to go for more information, whom to contact, and how to get involved.^{50,51} Digital tools lower the barriers and costs to participation, while social networking tools allow users to build on their strong face-to-face connections while forging many “loose” online connections that can be activated around public events or issues, spreading information and influence.⁵² Broadcasts, documentary films and reporting projects are now often strategically designed to include user participation at each phase—including conception, fundraising, investigation, curation of resources, coalition building, and advocacy efforts.

Increased user participation and involvement was mentioned as a goal by all of our interviewed experts. “It is the end of the Sage on the Stage,” said Amy Eisman. “It is the end of one person going out there and reporting. Users want to participate in gathering information, collating, and imparting it.”

Bill Densmore emphasized that user participation is central to the public service aspect of public media: “People feel really shut out of the content process, and if there is a way to involve more along content creation, productions, forums, discussions, and follow-ups—the

whole life of content—the public should be included in that process in a better, more meaningful way.”

Densmore argued that true dialogue on civic issues requires an almost Socratic method of challenge, query, and answer on the part of journalists. “In the heyday of newspapers, civic dialogue could be altered and informed by the Sunday investigative piece on Page One,” said Densmore. “It was the point where the editor took on the teacher-coach role. It is the core of community. Digital journalism sites are well poised to continue this.” We return to this role in the best practice on “Repurpose, Remix, Recycle,” describing Densmore’s proposal that the future should involve news organizations serving a trusted “information valet” function in their communities.

Other experts noted the potential of user participation to enhance specialized areas of reporting, (a topic we return to in our next best practice). As Chuck Lewis of the Investigative Reporting Workshop predicted: “I believe over the next few years, we will be able to do really spectacular national and international reporting projects, using thousands of citizens to assist in the process. I am talking about a directed project where you combine the seasoned experience of journalists with the knowledge and astonishing eclectic range that citizens can provide, melding that together with responsible, careful, and fact-checked projects.”

One of the experts that we interviewed suggested a relatively simple strategy for increasing user participation: provide more transcripts and text versions of multimedia content such as podcasts and video. Said Eisman: “Text will not go away. It is the fastest way to consume information and it enables comment. Many users would rather read a transcript than watch a whole video, so if you can offer both, it is going to sponsor more interactivity just through convenience.” She notes that text also magnifies the traffic coming into a page through search engines.

Other experts also raised the need to structure “quality” participation on the part of online users. Interviewees stressed that too much of online participation involves ideologically like-minded conversations and/or emotion-driven bickering and “flaming.” There is no easy solution to avoiding this human tendency online, but within our examples for this best practice, we review several possible methods. These strategies, however, still need further development and evaluation. In short, while user involvement has been emphasized as an emerging best practice, more consideration is needed of what counts as quality participation and the various strategies that foster it.

Another mistake occurs when news organizations view contributions from users as just another strategy for boosting traffic and page views. Instead, it is important that news organizations consider users as potentially invaluable content collaborators, either as a substantive commentator and/or amateur reporter whose work boosts the overall quality of content. Moreover, participation should not be thought of as something that occurs after newsgathering and publication is complete. Rather, users can be directly involved in reporting and interpreting the news.

Said Lee Rainie:

The best news organizations allow citizens to contribute directly to news stories. They provide space and tools to allow the wisdom of crowds and the immediacy of direct crowd observation to show up in their content. Citizens post pictures, text and videos of breaking news story that provide eyewitness observation that is otherwise missed when credentialed reporters are not on the scene. In addition, citizen involvement allows coverage of things that would not be otherwise covered...It's one thing to allow letters to the editor. In the Internet age, it's quite another thing for news organizations to be involved in active and ongoing conversation with those who "consume" their news. This is [the] age of transparency for all organizations, including news operations. So, the most forward-thinking news organizations explain themselves and then listen and react seriously and respectfully when members of their audience have further things to say.

Jane McDonnell described the need to involve users in similar terms:

I know that the web is all about information, but more and more, I see it as being about people connecting over information. For the purposes of CPB, the digital revolution should be a way to dive into the connection viewers and listeners feel with the people you feature, whether on audio or videotape. Start with the person and their story, and then let the technology get you to the best way to create and deliver it.

Public broadcasting examples:

Among our other experts, Tom Rosenstiel pointed to Minnesota Public Radio's (MPR) Public Insight Journalism [\[link\]](#) project as a model for using listeners not just to react to stories, but to help MPR plan coverage and find sources. In broadcasts, MPR directs its listeners to its website, where they are invited to provide their personal views and experiences related to leading news stories. Recent examples include an invitation for listeners and web users to share their experiences with the economy and with credit card rates. Another query encouraged users to describe their stories as members and veterans of the military.

Conversation and "ask-the-expert" style discussion boards are also often features on public broadcasting sites, such as the companion blog for *Bill Moyers Journal* [\[link\]](#), which divides content into "our posts" and "your comments." One common approach involves giving users a single task such as reporting on their voting experiences, as was the case for the Twitter Vote Report [\[link\]](#) project, or sharing personal stories, as in the Veterans History Project that accompanied the PBS documentary *The War* [\[link\]](#).

Defining user tasks narrowly does encourage targeted contributions, but precludes broader involvement by users in defining news agendas. Some public broadcasters are providing the context for further participation. For example, NPR's Planet Money blog [\[link\]](#) has introduced strong multimedia components that encourage regular participation—embedded videos, a Twitter feed [\[link\]](#), podcasts, Flickr slideshows, and "open threads" calling for user questions which are answered in the podcast—techniques more familiar to the readers of blogs than traditional news sites. For the inauguration of President Obama, NPR partnered with American University's School of Communication and CBS to create a Twitter tag,

#inaug09, which became one of the top-ten Twitter feeds on its way to providing two-tier—citizen and professional—reportage of the event.

In other examples, an MPR news game, *Consumer Consequences* [\[link\]](#), simultaneously challenges users to rethink the sustainability of their lifestyles and gathers data for related stories. The Capitol News Connection’s Ask Your Lawmaker project [\[link\]](#) encourages users to submit and vote on questions for public radio journalists to ask legislators. Webmasters can add a related widget to their site to encourage their audiences to contribute questions. *Frontline/World’s iWitness* [\[link\]](#) combines webcams and the Internet telephone service Skype to enable citizens and experts on the ground to report on breaking news.

External examples:

Outside of public broadcasting, user-driven reporting and participation is thriving. There are many examples of innovation in the commercial media sector. CNN’s iReport [\[link\]](#) encourages users to submit “stories” on topics of interest to users or on topics relevant to breaking or other news stories that the network is already covering. The feature has developed a real following. It is now woven into television online coverage as if the iReporters are professional journalists. CNN’s electoral map calculator for election 2008 [\[link\]](#) allowed users to calculate the electoral map outcome for the presidential election. The feature can be viewed as an “outreach” tool to engage users to go to the CNN website for an experience that is unique to that website.

Participatory digital content has the potential to move from broadcast to online. For example, HGTV’s “Rate My Space” [\[link\]](#) started as an online feature to rate people’s home (or other “space”) projects and has turned into a successful television program where low-rated spaces get makeovers. Lifestyle features like these can be coupled with reporting on related issues to simultaneously entertain and inform users.

Citizen media projects like Minnesota’s The UpTake [\[link\]](#)—with a motto of “Will journalism be done by you or to you?”—are training and organizing citizens to use cell phones and digital video cameras to cover breaking news. The project has scored noteworthy coverage of the RNC protests and the Franken-Coleman Senate vote recount. Editors and reporters at the Polk Award-winning Talking Points Memo [\[link\]](#) often depend on users for news tips and crowdsourced investigation.

The Chi-Town Daily News [\[link\]](#) has developed a network of neighborhood-based reporters who provide hyperlocal community coverage. Such projects often combine trained (and paid) editors and reporters with volunteers, representing what legal scholar Lawrence Lessig terms the emerging “hybrid economy.”⁵³ Such projects emphasize user participation as much as, if not more than, production.

Personal narratives provide a popular entry point for tackling public topics. Created by the Creative Counsel and The Fledgling Fund, The 1000 Voices Archive [\[link\]](#) is a curated collection of video stories that address social issues in the United States. According to their website, “The 1000 Voices Archive is designed to tap into the power of stories to encourage community conversations through a wide range of advocacy tools. In this way, each of our storyteller videos becomes a ‘public dialogue engine.’”⁵⁴ An interactive map of the United States allows users to search for videos based on a “core value” (human rights, justice,

sustainability, etc.); an issue (education, health, immigration, etc.); a “special series” (Asian American voices; rural voices; senior voices; etc.); and/or a geographic region. Each film is accompanied by fact sheets, links to news articles and other resources for learning more about a particular social issue. Features such as the “Inspire your Leaders” and “Tell the Media” tools allow users to send customized letters to their representatives and editorial boards of local media outlets, with sample text provided.

Profiles in Practice—Involvement

Buffalo Rising is a traditional advertising-driven glossy monthly magazine that was launched in combination with a daily- and weekly-updated social media site. The content focus is on hyperlocal coverage of the city of Buffalo, with a heavy emphasis on articles about city and neighborhood development. The editors of *Buffalo Rising* have also partnered with local NPR affiliate WBFO to appear for 30 minutes weekly for a live discussion of the latest articles at the social media site. The interviews are archived and podcast as part of WBFO’s news RSS stream. Both the stories for *Buffalo Rising* and the WBFO segments emphasize civic impact, providing information to readers about how they can act on issues or events, or get involved in city planning, with the explicit goal of improving the economy and quality of life in the municipality. The editors of *Buffalo Rising* also openly advocate for development ideas, reporting in follow-up fashion on how their stories have shaped the decision-agenda at City Hall, the county, or at the state level. The *Buffalo Rising* news and social media site has over 5,000 registered users. Co-founder George Johnson believes that registration creates a sense of “membership” and “ownership,” increasing the quality of comments, feedback, and participation at the site.⁵⁵

Related links:

Buffalo Rising [\[link\]](#)

WBFO podcast [\[link\]](#)

2. Go deeper

News and public affairs outlets are taking advantage of digital platforms to add depth and context to coverage of breaking news, events, and issues. Digital journalism projects are also sustaining and expanding core public affairs specializations such as investigative reporting, international news, or science and environmental coverage⁵⁶—specialty beats that commercial news organizations are otherwise cutting.⁵⁷

Online tools and platforms allow media makers to build deep, multimedia reservoirs of content around particular beats or topics that extend user access to one-time broadcasts or provide context for ongoing coverage. Databases, maps, conversation tools and other interactive elements build in value and stickiness by encouraging interaction and providing multiple layers of detail. Such contextual sites retain value beyond the breaking news

moment, attracting users over time and establishing discrete sites as durable online references as well as enabling cumulative reporting capabilities in the online space.

As Lee Rainie suggested, offering deep content caters to the needs of a new generation of online media users. On most topics, users are merely browsing and “bumping into content” but “for the few subjects they deeply care about, they are deep diving.” Rainie pointed to the example of the economic crisis. A majority of Americans “are in denial” and may be avoiding news, but for a smaller segment, they “can’t get enough of the news, and are really engaged with the policy arguments that are going on.” Rainie added that this motivation to “go deeper” includes evaluating primary documents, exploring databases, and witnessing how other journalists outside their community or country are covering the story.

Going deep is also closely related to successful branding, noted Eisman. Specifically, strong brands are important in a media world where users have many choices. “The smart companies find that niche and owns it, like *Politico* [\[link\]](#). It is critical for anybody. There is not a hunger anymore for general interest journalism,” said Eisman. “For example, *The New York Times* has to figure out for its customers and readers what piece of their brand they can own. So if they own international politics, they should have a deep vertical on it. If they own arts, they then need a deep vertical and they need to do research on where people are coming from to find that content.” Brand-building, suggested Eisman, is also dependent on “being first” to report on a story or breaking issue.

Public broadcasting examples:

The 2008 election was a particularly fertile topic for such cumulative online reporting projects. Public broadcasters took this historic national event as an opportunity to pool news and information resources online. The CPB provided a grant for this collaborative effort, and PBS hosts the results on a portal site [\[link\]](#) featuring an “Election Connection Blog” that pointed to related content across public media; widgets containing election-themed quizzes, games and content; and a *NewsHour/NPR 2008 U.S. Election Map* that reflected state-by-state voting statistics and provided links that drilled down to local public TV and radio coverage. Widgets like APM’s Idea Generator and NPR’s Get My Vote project prompted users to contribute and rank content related to election issues, while PRX’s Ballotvox project looked beyond the public broadcasting universe, curating local election-related user-generated content from around the web.

Along with the *Christian Science Monitor* and Politico.com, NPR also participated in another map-based, deep-dive election project: “Patchwork Nation” [\[link\]](#). Produced by the *Christian Science Monitor*, the project tracked how the campaigns were addressing 11 different sorts of communities, from “military bastions,” to “immigration nation” to the “monied ’burbs.” The interactive project, which included tools for readers to identify their own communities, was designed to extend news analysis beyond just “red” and “blue” and into a more complex discussion of voters as a cultural, economic and social mosaic. Local bloggers from each of these communities contributed coverage as the campaign wore on.

External examples:

Online news packages: In the digital world, news organizations are able to offer special reports that contain a level of detail that is simply unattainable in a traditional, space-

restricted paper formats. Recently, news organizations have produced investigative special reports that combine traditional reporting and in-depth interviews with multimedia elements such as video interviews, blogs, and maps. For example, *The Washington Post's* "Fixing DC's Schools" seven part series [\[link\]](#) includes multimedia profiles and school "score cards" (databases of crime reports, health inspections, teacher qualifications, etc.) in addition to traditional journalistic storytelling.

Another example of powerful multimedia storytelling comes from NorthJersey.com: "Toxic Legacy" [\[link\]](#) is an exposé on the environmental damage caused by a New Jersey Ford plant. The piece includes video interviews, maps, charts, documents, and photographs enhanced by audio commentary. In addition to embedded photos, the articles contain links to high-quality Flash-based photo and video extras.

Many news sites are involving users by publishing interactive "news you can use." Investigative reporting is being combined with searchable databases, maps and other interactive elements to allow for a customized user experience. For example, in response to the I-35W bridge collapse in Minneapolis in 2007, MSNBC.com launched an interactive "Bridge Tracker" map as part of their multimedia "Bridge Inspections" series [\[link\]](#). Users can trace their daily routes on the map, and review condition and inspection reports for more than 100,000 bridges across the United States.

Searchable databases and investigative journalism: Similarly, *The Columbus Dispatch* and Sarasota's *Herald-Tribune* both included searchable databases of teacher misconduct in their respective exposés on abuse by educators. (See "The ABC's of Betrayal," [\[link\]](#); "Broken Trust," [\[link\]](#).) *The Seattle Times* published a similar database of doctor violations in their investigative multimedia report, "License to Harm" [\[link\]](#). These examples not only shed light on issues that are often not publicized, they make customized access quick and easy for the user (most often through zip-code searches). Many online newspapers have included searchable databases that provide relevant information to readers as part of their standard format. For example, the *Dallas Morning News's* Data Center [\[link\]](#) contains searchable databases of census information, bridge reports, legal notices, sports, and even recipes. The *Los Angeles Times's* Data Desk [\[link\]](#) keeps track combines 740,000 records into searchable maps and databases for local and national users.

Some newspapers are also combining investigative reporting with user participation in a new way: putting the public to work solving cold cases. Sarasota's *Herald-Tribune* published "An Enduring Mystery," a special report on a 1959 mass murder [\[link\]](#). In addition to interviews and crime-related documents, the report includes a panoramic, interactive recreation of the house in which the crime occurred, with virtual evidence in place for users to analyze. *The Scranton Times-Tribune* also has a regular feature on standing cold case files that allows readers to dive into historical data and review evidence [\[link\]](#).

Such in-depth features are not limited to local newspapers. On a larger scale, examples such as Reuters' "Bearing Witness: Five Years of the Iraq War" [\[link\]](#) combine storytelling with profiles, slideshows, a timeline and interactive maps, providing mass audiences with a comprehensive experience that showcases multiple perspectives.

Documentaries go online: Documentary films lend themselves to extended treatment online, because they have a longer shelf life than breaking news, and makers often spend years collecting related material.

The website for Robert Greenwald’s 2004 documentary *Outfoxed* [\[link\]](#) demonstrates how a single film can serve as the hub for a range of content and campaigns. Interviews from the film are available online under a Creative Commons license⁵⁸, which allows users to sample them. A transcript of the entire film is available, as well as a set of related internal Fox News memos compiled by media monitoring group Media Matters for America. A group of citizen media watchdogs called the “News Hounds” helped to monitor Fox News footage for the documentary, and continue to post daily updates. Greenwald’s production company now produces short, pointed viral videos under the series name “Fox Attacks.” And of course, visitors can purchase a DVD and the companion book, and read reviews and related articles.

Similar strategies have been adopted by other filmmakers. Newt Gingrich, for example, has used documentary and YouTube excerpts as a complement to his energy independence book *We Have the Power*. In a more prominent example, producers of the 2008 anti-evolution film *Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed* used a viral rap video caricaturing Richard Dawkins as a way to spread online and blogger buzz for the theatrical release. They also released early “super trailer” clips from the film on YouTube. The strategy helped *Expelled* and its narrator Ben Stein gain coverage on cable news and radio talk shows the week of the film’s release. *Expelled* currently ranks as one of the top ten grossing public affairs documentaries in U.S. history.⁵⁹

Non-profit partnerships: Foundations, university-supported non-profit partnerships and individual donors are also focusing their resources on producing in-depth, specialized reporting around important public affairs topics. In these cases, public affairs media providing deep content on a subject such as the environment are considered by these funders as part of the infrastructure that society requires to adapt to major social problems.

For example, ClimateCentral’s [\[link\]](#) aim is to serve as “a unique hybrid linking science and media: a think tank with a production studio.” Funded by the Flora Foundation and the 11th Hour Project, ClimateCentral produces locally focused news stories about environmental sustainability for communities across the country, distributing and syndicating these stories on the web, in print, and in local television news. By employing journalists in direct collaboration with scientists and other experts, the project challenges traditional conventions of journalistic objectivity and independence.⁶⁰

These deep-dive projects are attractive, and strive to serve clear public missions. But the question remains: if you build it, will they come? Later in our report, we discuss ways of thinking about impact measurements for such projects, examining audience engagement and influence.

Profiles in Practice—Going Deeper

Yale Environment 360 publishes daily and weekly feature reporting, analysis, and longer opinion articles by leading science and environmental journalists, scientists, other academics, and policymakers. It also hosts a daily updated blog tracking environmental and science issues and article features a heavily participatory user comment section. Hosted by the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, the initiative is funded by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and the Packard Foundation. The site is an example of an increasingly common digital format for in depth reporting and analysis, focused narrowly on what have been traditionally specialized beats at news organizations such as science, health, or foreign policy. The site is non-profit, foundation funded, and in partnership with a university. It commissions freelance features from some of the top veteran science and environmental reporters, many who have been laid off or bought out of their positions at print newspapers or magazines. In so doing, the site is an outlet for the type of in depth public affairs reporting that is quickly vanishing from commercial media. The site also publishes freelance articles from students and early career journalists, offering an important outlet for doing the type of journalism students aspire to in school, but find very little opportunity for in commercial news.

Related links:

Yale Environment 360 [[link](#)]

3. Reach new and non-traditional publics

Digital platforms are making it possible for producers to engage with more focused networks of users who share common identities, problems, issues or interests, rather than following a model that dictates coverage that appeals to a mass audience. Importantly, this creates openings for informing and serving minority, ethnic, and low-income publics that are often underserved by mainstream coverage—a core mission for public broadcasters. In turn, such content and perspectives can migrate to broader platforms, diversifying coverage and providing valuable context for more general constituencies.

The country's demographics are shifting, increasing demand for content that serves users from minority, ethnic, religious, and/or language groups that might fall outside of the traditional audience for mainstream public affairs programs. Digital journalism is being used to engage and serve the needs of users from these backgrounds. Reduced costs of online production and distribution mean that news content can be tailored to the interests, habits and preferred conventions of underserved audiences. It also means that new communities of producers can create content more cheaply, easily and quickly, fostering experimentation and professional development.

Digital platforms can change the game for ethnic media makers, long accustomed to fighting for air and column inches in legacy outlets. Now that distribution online is plentiful, identifying and attracting users is the complicated part. Once online, media projects also become available to a global audience, creating new opportunities for connecting diaspora communities across national boundaries. This allows ethnic media projects to share content

and audiences with outlets that serve diaspora populations. (See “Applying Best Practices, From Local to Global” below for examples of such outlets.)

Forming online connections between users and outlets, and among users is one key to such initiatives. Linking targeted coverage to social networking tools allows users to communicate not just with outlets or producers, but with one another, generating community ties, return visits and feedback loops that can suggest new directions for reporting.⁶¹ Access is another key issue. Elderly, low-income and lower-literacy⁶² users may need access to new devices, connectivity, ADA-compliant content, and media training before they’re ready to get some or most of their news online. But given the overall trends in news consumption, and public advocates’ efforts to direct resources to closing the digital divide, it makes sense for outlets that target underserved populations to start transitioning their formats to online platforms.

Public broadcasting examples:

The National Minority Consortia have been established and funded specifically to find and cultivate ethnic media makers and produce content that both appeals to niche communities and brings underrepresented perspectives to mass audiences. Often this content is cultural or historical, with a social justice orientation—emphasizing personal narratives, performing arts, reclaiming identity and unpacking stereotypes—rather than focused on breaking or investigative news. Much of the Minority Consortia activity is still tied to broadcast production (notably, film and radio), with some forays into multimedia and participatory production. In part this can reflect media consumption habits of the targeted users, as is the case with Native Public Media, which recently worked with Native nations to apply for a slate of low-power radio stations around the country.

There are some leading digital experiments, however. For example, the National Black Programming Consortium (NBPC) is partnering with the Independent Television Service (ITVS) to produce the Masculinity Project [\[link\]](#), which draws heavily upon participatory tools and platforms, and showcases a variety of perspectives on race and gender. The NBPC has also helped focus the Minority Consortia and their producer communities on new media with its annual New Media Institute [\[link\]](#). The New Media Institute, a professional development program for emerging producers, last convened from February 17- 21, 2009. This particular institute focused on mobile journalism, launching a site called Mojoco.org [\[link\]](#) that will serve as a training, networking and demonstration hub for mobile journalists interested in working on public media projects.

Creating programs targeted to minority users, however, can create a double bind. By definition, target audiences for such programs are smaller, which reduces revenue sources and clout for their producers. Siloed coverage of particular groups can also reinforce stereotypes. Issues of class, for example, cut across race and gender, as do cultural forms such as hip-hop or social problems such as widespread incarceration. Both online and off, public broadcasters need to undertake stronger efforts to increase the diversity of reporters, producers and sources in their news and public affairs content.

There is widespread agreement within public broadcasting that new approaches are necessary. For example, the Station Resource Group’s recent *Grow the Audience* report⁶³ identifies audiences of color as a key target demographic for public radio stations, and suggests that one way to attract such audiences is through an increased focus on news. In

May, a coalition of organizations that work to diversify public broadcasting content also issued “An Open Letter to Our Public Media Colleagues,” which reads in part:

We now have the bandwidth to build a public media system to serve America’s increasingly diverse demographic while remaining vital and relevant to our core audiences. Reaching out to new constituencies while serving existing audiences is the imminent business challenge of the next decade. The challenge is more than a moral imperative: What’s at stake is our ability to not just survive, but to thrive in the new media market.

...America’s younger and more ethnically diverse audiences are public media’s great, untapped resource. Young viewers and listeners are multilingual and multicultural, passionate bloggers and voracious content seekers. The increasingly commercial Internet positions them primarily as consumers, but they are hungry to exercise their power of choice as global citizens and generators of media content in the new digital landscape. For example, young African American adults, especially college educated, are avid Internet users. They frequent alternative news sources online and download digital content, including radio and television programs, podcasts and interactive media. Our public media system must target these savvy post-broadcast audiences and provide a civic public interest sector in emerging broadcast systems, mobile media, and on the web.⁶⁴

External examples:

One online resource designed to serve low-income users is the One Economy Corp’s Public Internet Channel [[link](#)], which combines video series about topics such as economics and family life with interactive resources. Each page contains a “toolbox” of options for learning more. For instance, their crash course in everyday economics contains links to internal resources that explain how to file taxes online, how to properly write checks and resources for understanding 401K plans.

Aggregation can reveal common themes among formerly siloed ethnic outlets. *Voices That Must Be Heard* [[link](#)] is a free, weekly online newspaper that aggregates and, when necessary, translates important articles from New York’s minority and immigrant publications. It is distributed for free online, and it is widely disseminated among nonprofit organizations, government officials, universities and media organizations. The project is a nonprofit initiative from the New York Community Media Alliance and it is funded by the J.M. Kaplan Fund, the Ford Foundation and the Katherine and David Moore Family Foundation.

Creating niche news projects isn’t just good public service, it can also be good business. Many local print-based ethnic media projects are commercial, and have developed durable advertising and distribution relationships with local businesses that serve their communities. These outlets are also serving as points of contact for civic campaigns around issues such as public health, voting, and disaster preparedness. Ethnic media outlets often have a strong community service mission, offering focused neighborhood and investigative coverage, and resources for both assimilation into the U.S. and connection to cultures of origin. These smaller outlets have been slow to adapt to online journalism; a recent survey of 125 ethnic media outlets reveals that only 42 percent have online versions of their publications.⁶⁵ This suggests an opportunity for skill-sharing or joint training with public broadcasting stations,

which often lack the capacity to report on ethnic communities and have also expressed the need for new media training.

Profiles in Practice—Reaching New Publics

New America Media (NAM) has emerged as a visible and effective hub for ethnic news outlets. This project not only makes the content of individual outlets more accessible to general audiences, it provides opportunities for making connections among outlets and users across shared concerns. The site serves as a portal, with original and aggregated multimedia content (text, photos, radio, video, photo galleries and blogs), organized by ethnicity as well as by beats such as “education,” “health,” “indigenous,” and “intersections.” With its YO! Youth Outlook project, NAM also curates youth media content from a range of outlets and sources, with a strong new media emphasis. “New America Now: Dispatches from the New Majority,” is an hour-long news and culture audio magazine by and for California’s ethnic communities. Listeners can download it online, and the program airs on San Francisco public station KALW, with shorter segments available for broadcast across public radio. NAM has also pioneered new routines for outreach to ethnic publics, via a multilingual polling initiative, including the first ever youth poll conducted by cell phone. Results of these polls offer journalists, politicians and social scientists unique and targeted opinion data. Finally, for ethnic media, NAM is establishing shared professional norms, recognizing excellence, and creating measures of impact through partnerships with journalism schools and national and regional awards.

Related links:

New America Media [\[link\]](#)

4. Repurpose, remix, recycle

Meaningfully repurposing existing content online can include shifting content from one platform to another, or the aggregation of existing news and data sources around particular issues. Such projects maximize user access to existing content and create new value and utility for users through smart curation.

In addition to providing free access to online archives of breaking content, outlets are pushing content out to open platforms and user sites, and repackaging historical collections in order to engage users in content curation and creation. This best practice allows news organizations to brand themselves around deep repositories of authoritative content in a particular subject area. As reviewed earlier in our report, with their public interest mission and community focus, public broadcasters are particularly well positioned to serve as keepers and interpreters of historical memory.

In constructively aggregating content around a topic, Bill Densmore suggested that media organizations can serve as “information valets” and trusted “concierges” who are anticipating users’ information needs on a topic and providing for them. “Media

organizations have to stop thinking of themselves as creating an audience and delivering it to advertisers and have to start thinking of themselves as providing an invaluable service to consumers of digesting and sorting and linking to information they need to get through their day,” he said.

Public broadcasting examples:

Aggregation offers public broadcasters many opportunities to serve as trusted guides⁶⁶ to innovative, high-quality reporting and public affairs content for different groups of networked users. For example, surveys show that public broadcasting is among the most trusted sources of information about science. Online companions to programs such as PBS *NOVA* provide authoritative repositories of educational materials, backgrounders, and video clips.⁶⁷ These types of online resources serve to further strengthen the PBS brand relative to science and education. Many other aggregations both within and across outlets are possible. One blogger has even started aggregating choice public broadcasting content on a site called The Mediavore [[link](#)].

External examples:

Online tools such as RSS feeds, social bookmarking sites, and open video sharing platforms facilitate aggregation of content, bringing attention to issues and communities of strong user interest or need. Aggregation is popular and valuable across print (see *The Week* [[link](#)]), broadcast (see *Infomania* [[link](#)]), and online (see “Other Magazines” from *Slate* [[link](#)]), providing users with a trusted source on issues they care about while cutting down on the effort and time required to track news.

NewsLadder [[link](#)] is a site with a progressive political slant that allows users to rank existing news stories, videos, blog posts, and other online media content. News items are published in a general NewsLadder, and they are also categorized by subject matter. There are currently 22 specialized NewsLadders featured on the main page, with subjects including the Minnesota Senate recount; the economic stimulus plan; Texas justice; and Iraq. Each NewsLadder contains three strands: “What’s New” highlights the latest ranked content; “What’s Up” shows news that users have ranked as especially important; and “Editor’s Choice” features top-ranked stories chosen by the editors (comprised of a national team of notable bloggers). NewsLadder makes ample use of RSS feeds, and it also includes three variations of widgets that allow users to embed NewsLadders on their own websites.

The Daily Beast [[link](#)] is a commercial news aggregator that “sifts, sorts, and curates” news stories from an editors’ point of view. In addition to featuring various breaking news items, *The Daily Beast* publishes original content from contributors ranging from libertarian commentator and author Christopher Buckley to *Project Runway*’s Laura Bennett. News stories are showcased in a unique manner: the daily “Big Fat Story” analyzes a major story using a diagram with links to further information, and the “Daily Cheat Sheet” synthesizes the day’s top stories and provides links to additional information. Another facet of the site, “The Buzz Board,” allows users to obtain various recommendations for books, movies, and events from celebrity “insiders.” Users can filter by the area of expertise or interest, the “insider” making the recommendation, and by the type of recommendation.

Profiles in Practice—Repurposing, Remixing, Recycling

The ScienceBlogs.com Portal⁶⁸ is an online community that aggregates and connects 100 independent science-related bloggers with a community of more than 1.5 million monthly users. The focus is science, technology, the environment, and politics, though topics range into philosophy, pop culture, and faith. Bloggers added to the portal are recruited based on their area of expertise (i.e. physics, biology, philosophy, law, public health etc) and their track record of success with their own independent blogs. Bloggers include university scientists and doctoral students, attorneys, physicians, journalists, social scientists, and filmmakers. The most successful bloggers average between 200 to 1000 user comments *per post*, writing as many as a dozen posts a day.

The individual posts by the 100 bloggers are categorized into ten subject area channels such as Life Sciences, Environment, Education & Careers, Physical Science, Politics, and Medicine & Health. Users can choose to read and RSS subscribe to their favorite individual bloggers and/or read and subscribe to a specific channel at the main portal engaging with posts in a subject area from a variety of authors. ScienceBlogs was launched as an extension of for-profit print magazine *Seed: Science is Culture* and has subsequently boosted the magazine's brand, visibility, and subscriber base. *Seed*, however, provides little to no editorial oversight for bloggers. ScienceBlogs generates revenue through paid advertising, mostly by pharmaceutical, energy, chemical, and book publishing companies attempting to co-brand themselves with science with an elite audience, much like these same companies underwrite productions of PBS *NOVA*, *Scientific American Frontiers*, or the *PBS NewsHour*.

Related links:

ScienceBlogs Portal [[link](#)]

Pharyngula blog (monthly traffic over 1 million): [[link](#)]

5. Collaborate:

Collaborative digital news and public affairs projects are being organized around shared issues, locations and user communities. These projects can involve connections between different sorts of media outlets as well as related organizations, institutions, and publics.

Outlets, stations, reporters, filmmakers and citizen media makers are engaging in collaborations that raise awareness of particular topics, expand and engage audiences, and draw on the expertise and resources of universities, museums, and other non-profits. Such multiplatform collaborations combine the strengths, skills, resources, and constituencies of the partners in order to amplify impact and increase depth and breadth of coverage.

Collaborative media projects are now much easier to organize online than in previous years, free from the physical limitations and high costs of print or analog production and distribution. Online project management tools, group listservs, file sharing, instant messaging and low-cost telephony all facilitate joint production across organizations and distances, while open media sharing platforms and easy-to-use content management systems

for serving up multiplatform content online make dissemination a breeze. Joint branding, crosslinked sites, and multiplatform rollouts are common. While commercial media makers use cross-platform and cross-organizational strategies to produce “synergies” that strengthen their brands and draw in more customers, public media makers can use similar strategies to increase awareness of issues; drive support to the public sector in the form of donations, loyalty and political support; and build and mobilize publics.

Collaborations within public media: On collaboration, several of the experts we interviewed emphasized the implications for public broadcasting. One focus was on the likely need for greater collaboration and coordination among public broadcasting organizations that produce content for different platforms.

Our interviewees urged that media organizations shift from thinking about the web exclusively as a “secondary” or alternative place for print or broadcast content. Instead, the web should be a platform with its own unique identity and content. “Digital journalism is being seen as its own industry,” said Jane McDonnell of the Online News Association. “Instead of taking material and throwing it online, they are now creating material for all the online platforms that are possible.”

In his interview, Tom Rosenstiel forecasted what this trend might mean within public broadcasting:

The differences between platforms are eroding. I don’t think they’ll vanish. At some point, PBS and NPR are going to have to decide like everybody else: online, are we PBS, NPR, or a unified version of both? There is work being done on that very issue right now. People have to decide: Are they Internet first? Are they TV first? Are they text first? The idea that you don’t care and you do them all equally is nonsense and it’s not the way people work... Each technology and platform brings with it its own culture. Each news organization is going to have to decide which culture it comes from. NPR is a radio culture. It has a website, but it’s a radio culture. PBS is a TV culture. In fact, PBS is actually a TV *program culture*. That makes a huge difference. It profoundly influences decision-making. It’s not just “malleable”—that’s just a buzzword.

One veteran journalist we interviewed went so far as to suggest that the newsgathering and reporting done by *PBS NewsHour*, *Frontline*, *NOW*, and NPR might benefit from being merged under one central editorial staff and leadership. The experts we interviewed also emphasized that trends in digital media point to a re-evaluation of the relationship between local stations and their central programming source, noting that users increasingly no longer need to listen to their local station in order to engage with NPR news programming.

Kinsey Wilson of NPR, who used to run USA Today.Com, took an even broader view of the collaboration demands within public broadcasting, connecting them back to familiar themes of public media as a trusted brand and news guide:

I think the distinction between commercial and public media begins to break down – or, put it another way, the definition of public media begins to broaden over time in ways that are not entirely clear at this point. I think institutional public media has the

opportunity to be a partner, possibly a platform, for other public media efforts that don't necessarily live directly within our brand. We already partner with certain commercial media and so I think there's bound to be sharing and a blurring of distinctions between various public media entities. That's already the case. The public doesn't understand the distinction between APM and PRI and PRX and all these different institutions. Who's a content producer versus a distributor? What we do have, in the aggregate, is a high degree of trust attached to these institutions. And that's the value that needs to be preserved. In addition to being providers of trusted content, we also have the opportunity to become trusted guides to the best content that is available, whether we create it ourselves or others create it.

Collaboration at the local level and across other media: Several of the experts we interviewed also noted the potential for public media organizations to be conveners and catalysts for shared coverage across a variety of local news organizations and outlets. Jan Schaffer at J-Lab suggested that collaboration across media was generally much easier when there was a common geographic identity and context. She noted that for the public, traditional "I got it first" scoop journalism is no longer relevant.

Bill Densmore concurred, noting that in 35 years experience as a journalist he has "come to the conclusion that collaboration across platforms is not only good but vital because the resources of any one platform are not sufficient to do what needs to get done. I think at the local level, that's less insidious than at the national level."

Public media can also coordinate and collaborate in producing content with local institutions that share similar educational and information dissemination functions, such as universities or museums. Densmore, for example, specifically suggested public libraries:

There is a public library in virtually every community of every size. Those public libraries are becoming more and more community information resources and services. They don't have the money to really do it right. But it means that in almost every community there is someone who cares about the First Amendment and about disseminating information to the public. Most libraries are now wired and have public terminals. One of the questions I've been asking is what is the potential to connect news organizations to public libraries to help each other do their respective jobs?

Densmore highlighted as a model the collaboration between West Oakland Public Library and the *The Oakland Tribune*, which opened a "citizen journalism" bureau at the library to provide training and resources for people who are interested in producing news.

Other experts, however, emphasized the potential and need for collaboration across common boundaries for journalism, focusing specifically on global partnerships. Referring to investigative journalism specifically, Chuck Lewis argued, "never in the long history of news has there been this extent of collaboration between media outlets and specific and diverse communities."

What collaboration means for journalistic norms: Not surprisingly, these new forms of collaboration raise questions about the traditional norms for journalists and news

organizations. First, if journalists are collaborating with institutions such as universities or foundations, it may raise questions of independence and objectivity. Lewis, a pioneer in developing new models of non-profit investigative journalism, views these concerns through a unique lens. In terms of university-based collaborations, he sees the biggest challenge as becoming entangled in multiple layers of decision-making and administration, rather than any threat to independence or objectivity. For collaborations with foundations, he suggested, “you have to have standards and transparency about where your funding has come from. You need to separate reporters and editors from the sources of funding. The wall is useful and something that should be kept. Ultimately, the way to instill and protect credibility is to have standards and to be transparent about them.”

Second, our interviewed experts were unanimous in arguing that professional journalists need to adapt to collaborations with citizen reporters and contributors, noting an air of arrogance and elitism that currently hinders this shift. As Jane McDonnell of the Online News Association argues:

Community journalists do their jobs based on enthusiasm and real knowledge of their communities and sometimes what they’re missing is that reporting skill and that knowledge about libel, really simple things. Professional journalists have gotten so mired in the idea that we are guardians of all that is true and good and we know better than everybody else; that arrogance has really been their downfall in a lot of ways. There’s a lot to be learned on both sides, I think.

In addition, Lewis describes the current climate of legal jeopardy and defamation lawsuits against “amateur” journalists and bloggers as forcing an evolution in standards relative to accuracy, though other central norms still lag behind: “Responsible bloggers are beginning to recognize that with the boundless freedom to publish also comes a public and legal responsibility to be accurate. So while some standards and practices are gently shifting forward in a positive way, the potential for violations of personal privacy and malicious commercial and political activities [remains] very real.”

Public broadcasting examples:

Documentary films are a leading example of public media serving as the locus of collaborative outreach and partnerships, featuring offline and online components. *Lioness* [\[link\]](#), which premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival and was broadcast on the national ITVS television series *Independent Lens*, is designed to stimulate a national dialogue about the shifting role of women in the military. It tells the stories of five female soldiers, sent to Iraq as cooks, mechanics, clerks, and engineers, who became the first women in American history to engage in direct ground combat—a direct violation of U.S. laws prohibiting the assignment of women to combat arms units. The film’s outreach strategy has included screenings on military bases and human rights and community circuits, as well as policy-making venues. Partnerships have been established with veterans’ service organizations, military families, and groups advocating for better services for returning women and gender equity among veterans.

As an example of local collaborations, KQED Quest [\[link\]](#) uses a multimedia social media site to integrate its Bay Area radio, TV, and online coverage of “community science, environment, and nature” subjects. The site features maps of regional events and story focus, a community blog, and partnerships/activities with museums, universities, and underwriters such as life science companies or the National Science Foundation. Philadelphia’s WHYY has also partnered with the *Philadelphia Daily News* to produce It’s Our City [\[link\]](#) a multimedia civic engagement blog that focuses on city issues and leadership, soliciting opinion essays from users.

The proliferation of new social media technologies can both facilitate and complicate collaboration; Andy Carvin, National Public Radio’s senior product manager for online communities, describes the process of organizing a joint online project offering breaking information about Hurricane Gustav as “collaboration in a crucible.” Juggling volunteer coordination across a social network, a Wiki, an email discussion and more, he mused:

Somehow, we’ve managed to keep [everything running], despite the use of these distributed tools having the potential to work at cross-purposes. But as I’ve watched the volunteers collaborate, their varying learning styles have become apparent, demonstrating just [how] everything evolved the way it did. Some haven’t wanted to proceed until they’ve mapped a particular activity visually, for example, while others would rather talk it through in a chat room. Some take a tinkering approach—try something on-the-fly and fine-tune it, while others prefer to have each step of a project mapped out in detail before proceeding. None of these perspectives is better than another; it’s just the ways different people work best.⁶⁹

External examples:

The 2008 elections catalyzed many new collaborations between traditional and nontraditional media. Notably, ABC and Facebook teamed up for election coverage, co-sponsoring televised debates. As part of this partnership, Facebook relaunched their “US Politics” application [\[link\]](#), which included debate groups, access to politicians’ Facebook Pages, political news and video from ABC News, and Facebook/ABC News “Election Pulses” (polls and Facebook candidate supporter counts). Similarly, CBSNews.com teamed up with social news site Digg for online coverage, featuring “Digg buttons” on election-related CBSNews.com articles and videos. During the primaries, MTV paired up with MySpace to host presidential forums, while CNN tapped YouTube to provide user-generated questions during presidential debates in the general election. Additionally, YouTube and PBS joined forces on the “Video Your Vote” project [\[link\]](#), a nonpartisan project in which voters shared videos of their voting experiences.

The American News Project [\[link\]](#) showcased news stories in the form of short online videos created by professional and citizen journalists. Launched in May 2008, the site partnered with other media organizations to offer their content for free online, leading to millions of views on thousands of diverse websites. Users were invited to suggest stories, freely embed videos on their own websites, and help fund specific projects. In March 2009, this project was folded into a larger investigative reporting effort from the Huffington Post and the Atlantic Philanthropies: The Huffington Post Investigative Fund.

The Chauncey Bailey Project [\[link\]](#) brought together a coalition of journalists from different kinds of news outlets, journalism schools, and national journalism organizations in response to the fatal shooting of *Oakland Post* editor Chauncey Bailey. Project participants are determined to finish the investigation that Bailey started into violence and financial fraud at a local bakery that has ties to local politicians, business leaders and the Oakland Police Department. Multiplatform coverage is being coordinated across the different outlets by Robert Rosenthal, executive director of the Center for Investigative Reporting, and aggregated online on the project site. An interactive timeline traces events related to the investigation.⁷⁰

Journalists are also using social media to create on-the-fly news collaborations. In Washington State, reporters from four local news outlets found one another on Twitter and agreed to coordinate coverage of local flooding and road closings using a common tag which enables them to aggregate the content from disparate sources to be correlated: #waflood. They then collected those tagged posts using Publish2, a free tool for newsrooms designed to support “link journalism.” This allowed them to create and post widgets on their respective sites, which featured breaking reports from users, as well as articles from other news sources—a free, ad hoc and participatory news wire.⁷¹ Such joint tagging is a free and flexible strategy that can be employed across a range of sites—Flickr (photos), del.icio.us (shared bookmarks), YouTube (videos) and more.

Profiles in Practice—Collaboration

Live from Main Street was a project of The Media Consortium—a network of U.S.-based independent journalism organizations. The five-part series combined both national and local media collaborations focused on the 2008 election. The project was designed to serve as a counterpoint to racehorse coverage of the election, instead focusing on substantive problems facing communities, such as the foreclosure crisis, voting rights, and national security. Journalist and political commentator Laura Flanders hosted five “town hall” discussions. Footage and audio of each show was offered to all Media Consortium members for broadcast. Producers arranged local partnerships for advocacy, distribution, outreach and rebroadcast for each show. In order to deepen coverage, LFMS pulled Media Consortium members in to participate in “investigation weeks” related to the town halls, creating a burst of coverage specific to the issues being examined.

Related links:

Live from Main Street [\[link\]](#)

6. Enable media literacy

Digital journalism is not just about effective use of technology or organizational restructuring. It also involves helping users to take advantage of an abundance of new media resources and choices, to become more frequent and more effective makers and users. This category includes examples of news literacy, media literacy, standards-setting and training to become citizen journalists.

Engaged users across the country are mastering digital techniques to create media, but in order to promote quality participation in public affairs, users need to understand how media are constructed, and they need to have a shared set of journalistic and production standards.

Indeed, each of the experts we interviewed emphasized the importance of “media literacy”: formal initiatives that educate users on how to take advantage of the many quality public affairs content choices available to them. Such projects not only create bonds of trust, respect and familiarity with news organizations, but when incorporated into formal school and university curricula, they also grow the audience for public affairs coverage. In fact, Jane McDonnell of the Online News Organization views the socialization of students into enjoying and using public affairs media as central to the future profitability of media:

The real challenge in building a revenue model is making sure that true news is valued again, that people who know how to produce news are valued again. That’s kind of getting lost in all this—we need news literacy and how people can learn to tell fact from fiction, fact from rumor, fact from gossip. Journalists need to be sharing this knowledge with people who are trying to be journalists. Until that wall comes down, we’re going to keep having this battle—and this continued loss of money and the valuation of news. The smartest thing people can do is to start teaching about news literacy and allowing digital journalists and traditional journalists to get together more instead of putting a wedge between them.

Media literacy is most commonly defined as “the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and communicate messages in a wide variety of forms”⁷² Media literacy, which includes media analysis and media production activities, can be taught as a specialized course or, more commonly, embedded across the curriculum. It can also take place in both formal and informal educational and community-based settings, helping people of all ages to develop critical communication skills that are necessary to becoming fully engaged citizens. In recent years, the definition of media literacy has expanded to include a broader vision of “new media literacies” which encompasses a variety of digital skills such as networking, online play, multitasking, and transmedia navigation.⁷³ As the conceptualization of media literacy has broadened to include new digital skills, one former subset of media literacy—news literacy—has emerged as its own field of study. News literacy relies on the same principles as media literacy but focuses exclusively on news and journalism.

According to Howard Schneider, Dean of Journalism at Stony Brook University, news literacy can be defined as “the ability to use critical thinking skills to judge the reliability and credibility of news reports, whether they come via print, TV, or the Internet.” Furthermore, he adds, “Reliable information is actionable information— it allows news consumers to make a judgment, reach a conclusion, or take an action.”⁷⁴

Foundations, institutions and news organizations have begun to take interest in news literacy. Most notably, with support from the Carnegie, Knight and Ford Foundations, Stony Brook University’s School of Journalism has positioned itself as the center of news literacy education, with new curriculum projects for educators and high school and college students. Having already introduced cross curricular news-literacy initiatives at the college level, Stony Brook is now home to the nation’s first News Literacy Center, a training and research center

that will “bring together scholars and journalists to explore issues related to the reliability of news from print, broadcast and the web.”⁷⁵

Public broadcasting examples:

The increased attention to news literacy is of great importance to public broadcasters. As audiences become more media literate, they will expect more transparency from their media sources—including transparency about production processes, sources, and funding. PBS, long accustomed to creating curricula to accompany its programs, is well-positioned to build upon its recent forays into media literacy curricula with projects such as *Access, Analyze, Act*, described below. As educational standards begin to reflect this shift toward media analysis, public broadcasters will have ample opportunities to partner with educational institutions directly. The desired result—an audience that can comprehend, analyze, and create their own sophisticated media messages, will be beneficial to both newsmakers and news consumers. Public broadcasters are likely to enjoy the increased levels of audience trust that accompany media literacy initiatives.

Tools are being built, which are easily accessible on the web and potentially brand-building. For instance, during the 2008 election cycle, PBS collaborated with Temple University’s Media Education Lab to develop a series of interactive tools that encouraged news literacy and civic engagement among young people: PBS Teachers Vote [\[link\]](#). The initiative includes videos, lesson plans and production activities for middle and high school students. The curriculum, *Access, Analyze, Act*, is divided into three sections: the first is designed to help students seek out reliable sources of election coverage; the second is to help students analyze the quality and substance of existing news sources; and the third is to help students create their own media messages. The curriculum incorporates existing PBS resources as well as external sites that invite students to employ social media tools in order to advance civic engagement. For example, in one lesson plan, students analyze election-related radio programming from PRX, and then blog about their findings.

External examples:

NewsTrust [\[link\]](#) is a foundation-funded nonprofit devoted to promoting quality journalism through a process of evaluating news stories. Partnering with leading media organizations and educational institutions including PBS, *Scientific American*, Huffington Post, Global Voices, Link TV, the Council on Foreign Relations, Stanford University, Northeastern, Stony Brook, University of Nevada and Arizona State University, NewsTrust provides users with unique review tools that allow them to evaluate news stories based on specific journalistic ideals. The site includes a detailed guide on how to evaluate stories, inviting users to think deeply about elements such as accuracy, balance, context, fairness, originality, transparency and responsibility. It also includes a network for civic engagement consisting of over 7400 journalists, students and educators.

Spin Spotter [\[link\]](#) is a digital tool that attempts to promote understanding of bias and subjectivity in conventional news. Spin Spotter is a for-profit company that has created a mechanism that allows users to demarcate, edit, and share evidence of spin in mainstream news stories. Spin Spotter relies on an advisory board of prominent journalists from across the political spectrum that outlines standards for what constitutes “spin,” and a computer algorithm that relies on user input. Users download “spinoculars” and use them to create and share “spin markers” such as recycled press releases.

Some organizations are also educating people directly. The News Literacy Project [\[link\]](#) is a national, foundation-funded program that pairs active and retired journalists with secondary students in order to encourage enthusiasm for journalism and develop news literacy skills. By working with journalists and learning from their experiences, middle and high school students learn to discern the meaning behind media messages, sort facts from spin, and understand the importance of First Amendment rights. Together, journalists and students can experiment with new technologies. The journalists and students in this initiative are paired through a national directory on the news literacy project's website. The News 21 project [\[link\]](#), funded by the Carnegie and Knight Foundations, works with leading journalism graduate schools to revitalize curriculum and train makers of cutting-edge journalism in enduring standards.

This media-literacy approach is as interesting to commercial media as to noncommercial. The centerpiece of The IFC Media Project [\[link\]](#) is a documentary series produced by the Independent Film Channel that examines construction of the news. The project's website also includes a handbook for decoding the news and an interactive media literacy quiz. In addition to these online resources, the IFC Media project has sponsored a series of public media literacy town hall meetings with students, citizens, educators and prominent journalists in New York, Boston and Philadelphia.

In addition to helping audiences understand how news is constructed, some organizations are training users to report the news as well. Training citizen journalists, reporters and media makers is especially important in areas in which citizens have been disenfranchised. The international human rights group WITNESS [\[link\]](#) provides training and support for documenting human rights issues globally. In addition to providing equipment for filming and editing, WITNESS aids in promoting the videos on a global scale. Another human rights organization, DigiActive [\[link\]](#) trains activists around the world to use the Internet and mobile phones for reporting and outreach. PhotoVoice [\[link\]](#) teaches disadvantaged citizens to become news photographers. According to their mission: "We encourage the use of documentary photography by enabling those that have traditionally been the subject of such work to become its creator—to have control over how they are perceived by the rest of the world, while simultaneously learning a new skill which can enhance their lives."⁷⁶

Such training initiatives are not limited to impoverished areas, however. Denver Open Media [\[link\]](#) provides training, classes, and studio equipment. They also operate under an entirely user-driven philosophy: citizens create the programs, offer feedback, and vote on broadcast schedules.

Standards-setting for user contributors: Apart from formal news literacy training initiatives, other efforts have focused on formalizing norms and routines for contributors and citizen journalists. So-called "netiquette" has evolved elaborately from the rough-and-ready early days, because people have asserted and circulated norms—ranging from when to use emoticons, to the meaning of writing in all capitals, to what constitutes flaming, to sorting out the difference between providing helpful information and self-promotion. As citizen journalism evolves, and as professional news organizations increasingly make their own work more interactive, journalistic standards will develop by example and by circulation. Standard-

setters can also evolve into trusted sources, as they provide a context and platform for generating reliable, transparent news and information.

The principle and expectation that entries submitted and edited by users of the online encyclopedia Wikipedia should hew to a “neutral point of view” [\[link\]](#) is one example of how individual sites can encourage distributed users to actively establish and monitor cultural norms that support high-quality information. Wikipedia has monitors—highly involved Wikipedia volunteers—dedicated to patrolling for tone and balance; their dedication becomes a standard (sometimes contested) for others. Wikipedia’s neutral point of view standard was adopted by Christopher Lydon’s *Radio Open Source* [\[link\]](#) which used to be produced at WGBH and is now produced as a podcast in partnership with the Watson Institute for International Studies at Brown University.

Projects such as the Online Ethics Wiki [\[link\]](#) draw from earlier codes of media practice, applying them to the networked environment. YouTube’s Community Guidelines discourage posting videos that are obscene, violent, depict illegal activities, violate copyright law, or contain hate speech. The Global Network Initiative [\[link\]](#) has brought private companies, human rights organizations, academics, investors and technology leaders together to craft principles that guide information and communications technology companies when faced with government censorship or requests for user information.

Another example of the power of standard-setting is the work done by the Center for Social Media’s fair use project [\[link\]](#). This project, through codes of best practices, has educated makers and media organizations on the utility of the copyright doctrine of fair use (using copyrighted material without permission or payment, under some circumstances). It has changed industry practice within the U.S. It has done so by working within defined creator communities, where news of the utility of a standard circulates quickly.

Profiles in Practice—Enabling Media Literacy

Know the News is a Knight Foundation-funded initiative that employs interactive tools and games to help users develop news literacy skills and widen their awareness of global news. The initiative was born from Link TV’s *Global Pulse* and *Latin Pulse*, which are five-minute programs that present and analyze news gathered from more than 30 half-hour news programs from around the world. While *Global Pulse* and *Latin Pulse* were designed to promote news literacy skills, they lacked the interactive element that attracts a younger demographic. So, Know the News was designed as a dynamic tool for use in university level journalism and communication courses, although it is free and open to everyone.

The central feature of Know the News is a video remixer that allows users to edit global coverage of televised news stories. Users can then add their own commentary, and publish and share their work with the entire Know the News community. A customized ratings tool allows users to rate and comment upon remixes and stand-alone video news stories, evaluating them for fairness, accuracy, presentation and trustworthiness. Know the News also includes an interactive news literacy challenge; a wiki where educators and students can

post and share their research; and learning guides that outline the ways in which these tools can be incorporated into course activities.

Know the News's beta site was launched on July 29, 2008, in order to be incorporated into the Salzburg Academy on Media and Global Change. During its first few months as a beta site, it received over 2,000 distinct hits and over 14,000 pageviews. Know the News is currently in an outreach phase, partnering with professors for expanded classroom use. As it continues to expand, Know the News' producers are working to add more content in order to keep the news clips consistently up-to-date. They are also looking to enhance the site's community by incorporating social networking tools.

Related links:

Know the News [[link](#)]

7. Play with form to innovate and integrate new technologies

Digital journalism pioneers are innovating new formats, interfaces, and platforms for delivering news and information and for sponsoring audience engagement with public affairs. In some cases these piggyback on commercial open platforms and software; in others they leverage free open source software and related developer communities.

Public broadcasters have been on the forefront of developing previous generations of communications technology that serve the public, such as closed captioning. Strategic investments in innovation could pay off again, returning dividends of more connected, informed and active publics. Online, the culture of experiment is thriving, driven in equal measure by venture capitalists' interest in social media and the passionate user and developer communities that are building open source platforms and applications. Designers are working to develop digital news formats that are interactive, streamlined, and pleasing to the eye.

There is a recognition that photos, video, audio, graphics, games and interactive exercises can engage and inform as much or better than traditional forms of journalistic story-telling. Just as importantly, true innovation involves thinking through and using new technologies in way that promote the other best practices reviewed in this report, not just as a new gadget or diversion that can be marketed and used to drive traffic to a website. What follows are examples of specific technologies that have been actively incorporated into news organization efforts both inside and outside of public broadcasting. These early uses are still developing with trial and error and evaluation is needed.

Twitter: This microblogging site, which allows users to post "tweets" of 140 characters or less via the web or cell phones, has been rapidly gaining popularity among journalists and news consumers. It works well for on-the-scene coverage, tag-based aggregation of links and commentary, and simple, powerful social networking that can be used for crowdsourced reporting. Often individual reporters combine work-related and personal updates, breaking down traditional barriers between gatekeepers and audiences.

Several organizations are experimenting with the use of Twitter. CNN has recently acquired the popular @cnnbrk Twitter account that has more than two million followers.⁷⁷ Another example is the well-followed Twitter feed of Micah Sifry of the Personal Democracy Forum’s techPresident blog [\[link\]](#), which he uses to advocate for “open-source” politics. NPR also participated in two innovative experiments using Twitter to engage users in the election: Twitter Vote Report [\[link\]](#) and Inauguration ’09 [\[link\]](#).

News games: Topical and educational games are being designed to address breaking issues, provide creative ways to build collective knowledge, and help users play active roles that help them comprehend complex social systems. Games are an important rising medium, but can be expensive to design and difficult to promote. ITVS has taken serious issues such as obesity and peak oil and turned them into engaging interactive games. ITVS has a series of thought-provoking games, including World without Oil [\[link\]](#) (a simulation in which more than 1900 gamers from over 40 countries used blogs, Flickr, YouTube and podcasts to imagine their response to a sustained energy crisis, and FatWorld [\[link\]](#) an experimental, online game that examines American obesity, nutrition and socioeconomics. An external example is My U.S. Rep: Role Play Congress! [\[link\]](#) in which users take on the roles of their Congressional representatives based on real voting data.

Maps: Online and mobile maps serve a variety of reporting functions—as interfaces for location-based video, audio or text; as “mashups” featuring relevant geographical data; as tools for prompting crowdsourced reporting, and more. A key public broadcasting example is WNYC’s crowdsourcing project: Are You Being Gouged? [\[link\]](#) in which users mapped the prices of milk, lettuce and beer in the New York metropolitan area.

Visualizations: Sites like ManyEyes [\[link\]](#) provide online tools for both professional and citizen reporters to present data in multiple graphic formats. For example, U.S. Government Expenses, 1962-2004 [\[link\]](#) allows users to explore categories of government expenses over a four-decade period.

Mashups: Remixing video, audio and text has become a common form of online self-expression. Offering users tools for remixing news and documentary content can help them to learn more about the construction of narratives and perspectives. For example, ITVS’s Filmocracy competition [\[link\]](#) invited users to use the EyeSpot online editing tool to create their own mash-ups of Getty Images footage and *Independent Lens* clips.

Widgets and applications: Widgets are small, self-contained programs that can be embedded in websites. News outlets are creating widgets that feature selected content and making them available to bloggers and webmasters to post on their own sites as a form of “distributed distribution.” Similarly, developers are creating applications (“apps”) to push content to mobile devices such as the iPhone. Sunlight Labs recently launched an “Apps for America” contest to solicit applications that promote government transparency [\[link\]](#). NPR has had great success with its widgets [\[link\]](#), inspiring users to develop new widgets and build upon other user’s creations that promote the NPR brand.

Experimental interfaces: Many different developers are playing around with new ways to display headlines, news memes and hot topics. While these aren't always practical, they provide users with tactile and interactive chances to engage with current affairs. For example, Doodle Buzz [\[link\]](#) is an experimental interface that enables users to develop and explore typographic maps of news articles.

Screen savers: Like broadcast-based news tickers, news-based screen savers give users a chance to quickly scan headlines, with the added bonus of being able to click through to a story that catches their attention. For example, Digg Arc [\[link\]](#) is a screen saver that arranges news stories in a variety of compelling ways: by creating “arcs” around specific phrases, “swarms” around widely-read stories, “stacks” of popular articles and a constant flow of photos of user-ranked features.

Profiles in Practice—Playing with Form

The *New York Times* Interactive Newsroom Technologies Group is led by former print journalist Aron Pilhofer.⁷⁸ This internal team of developers works with *New York Times* reporters and editors to experiment with multimedia formats for news, including interactive maps, timelines, panoramic views, searchable video and more.

The group has created some truly innovative pieces. For example, they worked to develop “Casualties of War,” an interactive feature that matches photos of U.S. service members who have died in Iraq with personal statistics, audio interviews with friends and family, and ongoing visual analysis compiling data related to deaths. An inauguration-based feature, “I Hope So, Too,” visualized the top 29 hopes for Barack Obama’s presidency expressed by 200 people across 14 states. A partnership with Bloggingheads.tv offers short video commentary and debates between bloggers on the Times opinion section. Other projects have ranged from panoramic photographs (“On the Trading Floor”) to textual visualization (“One Word,”) to searchable transcript tools (“Democratic Debate: Analyzing the Details”).

Pilhofer also submitted a successful joint application with investigative journalism site ProPublica to the Knight Foundation’s News Challenge to fund a project called DocumentCloud, which will allow news organizations to display searchable collections of primary documents used in reporting. The project was inspired by a *New York Times* project offering a searchable database of eight years of Hillary Clinton’s public schedule when she was the first lady.⁷⁹

Related links:

Casualties of War [\[link\]](#)

Democratic Debate: Analyzing the Details [\[link\]](#)

I Hope So, Too [\[link\]](#)

On the Trading Floor [\[link\]](#)

One Word [\[link\]](#)

DocumentCloud [\[link\]](#)

Category 8. Promote political discussion and participation

Digital journalism sites are well-poised to foster political conversations and civic engagement, whether they are election-centered or policy-centered, partisan or not. Political sites tend to encourage and even rely upon user comments that can sometimes turn into rigorous discussions that inspire people to take action. These sites also provide so-called “mobilizing information” on how to get involved, whom to contact, and where to show up to participate or vote. Political conversations are also stimulated by government transparency initiatives.

Some of the most dynamic new media conversations are taking place in the political sphere. These initiatives do more than just sponsor discussion—they actively encourage and enable “cross-talk” interactions with fellow citizens from across political and social backgrounds. They also inspire civic participation and engagement through informal learning and feelings of efficacy but also by providing details that let citizens know how or even make it easier for them to contact elected officials, show up at events, voice their opinion, or influence their peers.

A number of election-related public broadcasting projects have already been described above. Outside of the public broadcasting universe, common types of political news sites can be divided into four major categories: partisan; mainstream, or “multipartisan”; government transparency; and entertainment.

Partisan news: Such sites typically speak to their political bases, and serve as fodder for reporting from mainstream and opposition sources. The left-wing Huffington Post [\[link\]](#) and the right-wing Drudge Report [\[link\]](#) have both built visible brands and attracted large audiences due to their constant stream of new content (both rely heavily on aggregation). While the news value of these sites is often called into question, there is no escaping the influence they wield. The conservative blog RedState [\[link\]](#) has tens of thousands of readers and promotes itself as “the most cited right of center blog in the media.”⁸⁰ The popular libertarian magazine *Reason* [\[link\]](#) sticks to a more traditional online magazine format but includes elements such as podcasting and videos. On the left, Talking Points Memo [\[link\]](#) follows a typical blog format, with aggregated articles and shorter original posts while The Daily Kos [\[link\]](#) relies on a large network of users who contribute original posts.

Mainstream/multipartisan: While some of the most successful political sites preach to the choir, there are also initiatives that seek to foster open debate across ideological lines. Examples include the nonprofit, user-generated multipartisan Citizen Joe [\[link\]](#), popular radio program “Left, Right, & Center” [\[link\]](#) and the “diavlogs” (short video discussions between two often ideologically opposed people) on Bloggingheads.tv [\[link\]](#). Also, Opposing Views [\[link\]](#) features experts’ debates on political and social issues, which users are encouraged to rank, vote upon and comment upon.

The recent presidential election both drove traffic to existing news sites and supported the launch of compelling new outlets. Politico.com [\[link\]](#), for example, is a very successful web-print hybrid political magazine that relies on rapid dissemination of information. Politico quickly established itself as an influential news brand. Fivethirtyeight.com [\[link\]](#) (made political statistics attractive during the 2008 elections by combining timely and reliable analysis of polls along with visuals such as maps, charts and graphs). The widely read RealClearPolitics [\[link\]](#) aggregates and filters political commentary, news, and polling data from all political perspectives.

Mainstream news sites such as CNN, *The Washington Post*, the *New York Times*, CBS, FOX and MSNBC devote large sections of their web coverage to political news. In fact, Fox has also recently launched Fox Nation [\[link\]](#), a news/opinion site that incorporates social networking and blogs and videos from popular Fox News hosts.

Government transparency: Digital platforms have also allowed for much greater checks and balances on government officials as well as journalists. Spearheaded by groups like the Sunlight Foundation [\[link\]](#), there are many examples of initiatives that push for increasing government transparency. For example, Open Congress [\[link\]](#) is a behind-the-scenes look at current bills and debates in Congress that allows users to track and comment on issues, donations and votes. Open the Government [\[link\]](#) is an advocacy group that fights for reducing secrecy in government. Their “Show Us The Data: The Most Wanted Government Documents” project [\[link\]](#) asked the public to identify the most important government documents and databases to be released in usable formats. Additionally, the award-winning MAPLight.org [\[link\]](#) is an interactive database that allows citizens to see the connections between campaign donations and votes.

New investigative sites are also focusing on government transparency issues. ProPublica [\[link\]](#) produces a raft of investigative journalism on political stories that are typically overlooked by mainstream sources. ProPublica has relied on crowdsourced information since its inception: users submit links to government transparency and accountability stories from around the web. Using the social bookmarking site Delicious [\[link\]](#) users can tag relevant stories with “PPlinks” for immediate review by ProPublica staff. The site recently stepped up its commitment to crowdsourced journalism by launching a new “distributed reporting” initiative lead by Amanda Michel, who formerly directed The Huffington Post’s grassroots citizen journalism project Off The Bus [\[link\]](#). In keeping with ProPublica’s general philosophy, this new initiative will involve partnering with other news organizations.

The Center for Public Integrity’s Broken Government project [\[link\]](#) enumerates the challenges facing the incoming administration with a comprehensive look at executive branch failures since 2000. The project’s editors selected 128 failures out of 250 proposed by a team of 13 reporters, who reviewed government reports, interviewed staffers and watchdogs, and solicited recommendations from more than 4,800 government employees. Users can browse the failures by agency or category, and rank them. The site launched in December 2008, and by mid-January had drawn nearly 100,000 visitors.

In the open online news environment, factcheckers play an important role in separating political realities from falsehoods. Factcheck.org [\[link\]](#), a project of the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania, monitors politicians’ public statements for

accuracy. Additionally, The Center for Media and Democracy hosts SourceWatch [\[link\]](#), a collaborative Wiki that profiles the people behind the public agenda, as well as PR Watch [\[link\]](#) an initiative that helps readers recognize recycled public relations pieces that masquerade as news.

There are several government accountability initiatives that facilitate conversations between politicians and their constituents. As mentioned previously in this report, Capitol News Connection’s Ask Your Lawmaker project [\[link\]](#) allows users to submit questions to their legislators and vote on other user’s submissions. Capitol News Connection journalists then take the top questions directly to members of Congress and post the answers on the Ask Your Lawmaker site.

Ask The President [\[link\]](#), which launched in March 2009, is a bipartisan effort from *The Nation*, *The Washington Times* and the Personal Democracy Forum. Users can submit and vote upon questions (including video questions) for the White House press corps to ask President Obama. (At the time of this writing, the president hasn’t provided any answers.) Ask the President is built upon the existing site CommunityCOUNTS.com, which provides a sophisticated online Q &A format to bloggers and public officials.

President Obama has also taken direct advantage of formats that allow for this type of communication. Change.gov, the Obama/Biden campaign site, included a user-submitted question feature called “Open for Questions” [\[link\]](#). During its first round, 20,000 people participated. By the second round, more than 100,000 people asked over 76,000 questions and cast over 4,700,000 votes. This feature has now been moved to White House.gov [\[link\]](#) where it continues to enjoy heavy user participation.⁸¹

Entertainment: Finally, there are a number of successful political entertainment hybrids. Comedy Central’s *The Colbert Report* [\[link\]](#) has effectively incorporated new technology in a multitude of ways, most notably by including humorous user-generated mash-ups, Wikis, and email campaigns that effectively link television broadcasts to web interaction. JibJab’s [\[link\]](#) original Flash-based music videos that poke fun at politicians and political issues have become viral sensations.

Political entertainment hybrids are successful outside of the U.S. as well. For example, Italy’s popular political blogger Beppe Grillo [\[link\]](#) is a comedian who combines political analysis with jokes. In Canada, *Canada’s Next Great Prime Minister* [\[link\]](#) is a CBC program in which Canadians aged 18-25 compete in debates on policy issues. They are judged by a panel of former prime ministers, and the winner is ultimately chosen through audience vote. The companion website hosts forums in which users discuss the show and debate policy issues, and it boasts it is “the largest online political debate in Canada.”⁸²

Profiles in Practice—Promoting political discussion and participation

Politifact, a project of *The St. Petersburg Times* received a Pulitzer Prize in 2009 for its innovative online tools for tracking political claims. The site offers contains three “meters” that help users “find the truth in American politics”: the Truth-O-Meter, the Flip-O-Meter

and the Obameter. Reporters and editors from the newspaper gather and assess the data that feeds each of these meters, and both the tools and the evaluations feature humorous commentary designed to engage users:

- The Truth-O-Meter ranks statements by politicians, lobbyists and those who testify in front of Congress on a scale of “true” to “pants on fire.” This summer, the scorecard has been closely tracking opposing claims about healthcare reform.
- The Flip-O-Meter kept track of candidates’ changes in positions during the 2008 presidential campaign, ranking them from “no flip” to “full flop.”
- The Obameter analyzes how well President Obama is adhering to his campaign promises, ranking his actions on a scale of “promise kept” to “no action.” As of late August, the Obameter had tracked 35 kept promises, 7 broken promises, just over 100 promises addressed somehow, and a whopping 372 still waiting for action from the president.

The PoliFact site serves as a resource not only for its users, but for other news organizations. For example, *Reason* used the Obameter to analyze which promises the president had elected to keep first.⁸³

Related links:

PoliFact [\[link\]](#)

VI. APPLYING BEST PRACTICES, FROM LOCAL TO GLOBAL

Since there are few geographical limitations on digital journalism, the best practices above can be employed locally, nationally, or globally. A new generation of digital journalism projects are demonstrating forms of coverage that cross national boundaries.

While many of the best practice examples reviewed in the body of this report are targeting audiences at the level of the local community or those aligned around niche interests and identities, these practices can be used by traditional news organizations and others to engage publics at a national level, or even across national and cultural boundaries. Transnational and global online journalism projects can serve as both partners and models for public broadcasters.

Digital distribution has allowed a new generation of global media projects to blossom. “The global digital platforms enable newsgathering across borders, instantaneously,” said Charles Lewis of the Investigative Reporting Workshop. “That added perspective and new reporting prowess provides an editorial fullness and living, ongoing record of publicly accessible knowledge about specific, relevant subjects.”

Globalization of a multitude of pressing public policy issues—from the breakdown of the international financial system, to immigration, to terror networks, to environmental concerns and more—has also raised the stakes for bridging national and ethnic divides, providing platforms for frank debate and establishing communications resources and training for disenfranchised populations. Such projects challenge conceptions of “minority” media and “foreign” correspondents, reflecting a shift from “parachute” journalism⁸⁴—often criticized as condescending and inaccurate—to more authentic coverage and commentary by community members.

Global Voices [\[link\]](#) has emerged as a leader in organizing and setting standards for citizen journalists around the world, demonstrating the value of bottom-up perspectives to both international reporters and curious readers. Working with volunteer translators and regional blogger-editors, the site aggregates and curates social media from around the world—blogs, podcasts, photos and video—and hosts related conversations. Special Coverage pages are designed to help journalists improve their international reporting; external sites are invited to post Global Voices headline feeds and podcasts and the site has become a source for traditional outlets such as the *New York Times*. Overall, the site is intended to “call attention to conversations and points of view that we hope will shed new light on the nature of our interconnected world.” Global Voices models a new kind of international news, demonstrating the fluid relationship between the global and the local—the “glocal”—since contributors are most often writing about events and issues local to them.

Ground Report [\[link\]](#) is a global site that allows anyone to publish articles as well as post videos. Trained volunteer editors oversee approximately 75-100 stories per day culled from the site’s 4,000+ international contributors. The organization partners with mainstream news organizations and shares revenues with its citizen contributors. In contrast, Allvoices [\[link\]](#) is a global citizen-journalism site with no editorial oversight at all—anyone can post about

anything, from anywhere. Allvoices depends entirely on computer algorithms to check for spam and relevancy and boasts that its site is “unedited by humans.”⁸⁵

Journalism entrepreneurs are also taking advantage of the lower costs, cheap storage and broader reach of online distribution to take a chance on costly beats that legacy outlets have slashed.⁸⁶ Launched in January, GlobalPost.com [\[link\]](#) aims to “redefine international news for the digital age.” With a Boston-based staff of 15 and a roster of 65 correspondents based in 45 countries, the site emphasizes building among both reporters and users.⁸⁷

Photojournalism is given priority placement, with a rotating selection of feature photos dominating the page. Videos offer vivid on-the-ground reports, while handpicked bloggers from around the world post more casual observations. A for-profit site, GlobalPost will rely on ads, syndication, and paid membership that offers users access to premium content. GlobalPost has arranged for correspondents to appear nightly on PBS show *World Focus*. Journalism analysts are watching to see if this site will be sustainable given previous failed experiments in subscription-based online news.⁸⁸

Some sites that foster global understanding do so for the specific purpose of publishing news that is generally underreported. U.S.-based NewsDesk [\[link\]](#) seeks out and publishes “important but overlooked news from around the world.” Likewise, The Pulitzer Center for Crisis Reporting [\[link\]](#) supports high-quality journalism around the world related to conflicts, natural disasters, electoral violence and more. Their map [\[link\]](#), allows users to choose stories on under-reported topics from any part of the globe.

OneWorld.net [\[link\]](#) serves as a hub and global online community for news about human rights organizations and activists. According to their website: “OneWorld is unique in that it not only has an editorial function but also engages in relationship-building work with human rights and development groups and their constituents. This dual purpose differentiates us from other nonprofit news-oriented services, allowing us to facilitate online and in-person dialogue between people and professionals working everyday for human rights and sustainable development.”⁸⁹

Digital formats also provide news organizations with room to showcase perspectives that were previously unheard. *Frontline/World* [\[link\]](#) offers thought-provoking coverage of global issues ranging from the punk rock scene in Israel to female suicide bombers in Sri Lanka to human organ sellers in India on both television and online. Newspapers are also able to feature in-depth looks at international issues through multimedia special reports. For example, *The New York Times*’ “Know Thine Enemy” [\[link\]](#) provides readers with a nuanced look into the world of Iraqi insurgent fighters. *The Globe and Mail*’s “Talking to the Taliban” [\[link\]](#) similarly provides a glimpse into the mindset of Taliban members through a set of standardized video interviews matched with interactive historical backgrounders on the region.

International media development organization Internews [\[link\]](#) has a mission that combines crossing cultural divides with training underserved populations. Through their work in over 70 countries, Internews has trained over 70,000 people by offering journalism education; helping local media professionals develop original programming; providing infrastructure support; and fighting for fair and reasonable media laws and policies.

Internews Network joined forces with Internews Interactive (InterAct) and the Independent Television Service (ITVS), to form Link TV, “the first nationwide television channel dedicated to providing Americans with global perspectives on news, events and culture.”⁹⁰ Since its inception in 1999, Link TV has widened its audience to more than 31 million U.S. homes over satellite, cable and Internet. Link TV has initiated many projects that attempt to overcome cultural barriers both internationally and within the United States. For example, its “Dear American Voter” project [\[link\]](#) allowed people from all over the world to upload personal video “letters” to American citizens that shared how they would vote in the 2008 presidential election, how American policies have affected their lives, and what they thought the priorities for the new administration should be. Additionally, Link TV encouraged its audience to think cross culturally when it launched the “One Nation, Many Voices” film contest [\[link\]](#), which asked users to submit, films that fostered greater understanding of Muslims in the United States.

Other global sites that began in one country but have successfully crossed borders include Japan’s B92 [\[link\]](#), Ushahidi [\[link\]](#), OhmyNews [\[link\]](#), and 2 Channel [\[link\]](#).

VI. AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

As we conducted this research, we noted related areas that do not fall within the scope of this study, but bear further examination.

The best practices detailed above focus largely on content strategy as it applies to digital platforms. However, editorial decision-making does not occur in a vacuum. In order to bring these best practices to life, managers and producers and reporters must weigh available resources and desired impacts.

In this time of technological and economic flux, tools for predicting both income and outcomes have become less reliable. Below we provide an overview of two areas that public media makers need to examine more closely in order to create and support high-quality, effective journalism projects.

Strong leadership and strategic planning, both on the part of the CPB and individual public broadcasting entities, will be necessary to thrive during this transition.

Business models

Part of this evaluation of best practices in digital journalism is the consideration of what low-cost changes public broadcasters can make. These stand in contrast to resource intensive shifts in focus and practice that may take an unprecedented amount of organizational collaboration, such as proposals to develop a system-wide “converged” news organization.

Right now, however, much of this is guesswork. More research, more trial-and-error, and more policy deliberation will be needed to reveal the right mix of commercial, government, and philanthropic support.

In the meantime, the transformation of journalism from broadcast to “beyond broadcast” will continue to be supported by familiar players. With some notable exceptions, many of the projects and outlets described above rely on government, foundation and donor support to survive. “Pro-am,” open source and citizen journalism sites also draw heavily upon a “gift economy,” in which users donate time in exchange for notice, credit, or project utility.⁹¹

Commercial news models have suffered multiple blows in the transition from analog to digital, with newspapers suffering most visibly. This has led to widespread analysis of and experimentation in journalism funding models, many of which are tailored to support print rather than broadcast news. Mark Glaser at PBS MediaShift⁹² summarizes a number of new models that have been proposed and tried, including ad placement on blog networks associated with news outlets; crowdfunding of particular beats or stories; producing customized hyperlocal papers for users; developing local portals that aggregate news sources; placing ads on multimedia content such as podcasts and videos; niche sites, and creating nonprofit news sites.

Public broadcasters have experience with this last suggestion, but the nonprofit news model has not proven to be particularly sustainable. For the 2008 Beyond Broadcast conference, Diane Mermigas of MediaPost analyzed how for-profit models might be applied to

nonprofit news projects. Her suggestions include experimenting with user-controlled funding models, such as the “Vendor Relationship Management” (VRM) online software proposed by Doc Searls of Harvard University’s Berkman Center for Internet and Society, and the monetization of social networks related to particular issues. Local public media projects also have its own opportunities for generating revenue according to Mermigas, including local applications of national content. “Redrafting alliances between programmers, advertisers and customers will allow for the unique integration and extension of content, communication, commerce and community,” writes Mermigas.⁹³ Recent user-funded journalism experiments, such as Spot.us, demonstrate these new alliances.

Impact measurement

Weighing the impact of new initiatives in digital journalism should not be a guessing game. Public broadcasting needs to arrive at a commonly shared set of expectations and metrics for assessing impact that include an evaluation of a) user numbers, diversity, engagement, learning, participation, and mobilization, b) the influence on other media in terms of their agenda and presentation of issues and subjects and c) the connection to community-level and national policy agendas and decision-making.

Understanding and tracking impact is a function of financial resources and expertise. Not every public media organization will be able to employ sophisticated impact methods, but for CPB there is a role for sponsoring and disseminating this type of research. Several of the experts we interviewed also suggest that much benefit could come from media organizations—including CPB—publicly releasing their internal data on audiences and usage and making the data available to academic researchers for secondary analysis.

Just as production of news content is likely to be increasingly collaborative with universities as partners, so should evaluation of impact. Local public media organizations can trade on their university affiliations to partner with communication researchers and survey institutes at their universities to conduct formal evaluation. Collaborations with university scholars have the added benefit of ideally leading to peer-reviewed publication that will generate additional quality research, and innovation. Additional support from CPB, affiliated foundations or government granting agencies for university-based researchers will sponsor advances in the design and impact of digital journalism.

From our conversations with the interviewed experts and our work on other projects, several dimensions and methods for evaluating impact are identified here:

Formative research with influentials and early adopters: Understanding impact starts before a digital journalism initiative is launched. A key method is to engage with influentials among a targeted set of users or groups, a form of “upstream engagement” that is often used in documentary film.⁹⁴ This research can take the form of in-depth interviews and online surveys with influentials, who are asked about the types of content and tools that would be of interest and use to their respective communities and affiliated groups. Then once a site is launched, these influentials would be asked to serve as active endorsers, promoters, and early adopters of the news project. They can also serve as bloggers or citizen journalists at the site.

Longitudinal panel surveys of users: Once a journalism project is launched, visitors and/or registered users to the site can be randomly sampled and interviewed at regular intervals over

time. These surveys would track their usage patterns, their knowledge gain; their connections and interactions with other users; their feedback on features and content of the site; and their identification and/or support for the sponsoring public media organization.

Analysis of “quality of participation”: Tools such as traffic counters, Google Analytics, and third party vendors such as Nielsen Online and ComScore can deliver metrics on total user size for a digital media outlet, but the quality of engagement also matters. One of the benefits of having users register at a site is that their “social recommendation” activity can be tracked, specifically monitoring whether users are spreading information and promoting the site through forwarded stories, recommending content to news aggregators, or linking by way of their blogs or social media applications. Content analysis techniques should also be used to track the quality of user engagement and contributions, examining depth of content, level of disagreement versus consensus and level of social support.⁹⁵ This type of tracking will add insight as to whether a digital journalism project is indeed serving as a mechanism for engaging users, facilitating discussion, and participation.

Tracking media and policy impact: Beyond evaluating users directly, as mentioned, the influence on the agenda of other media and that of community groups or policymakers are also relevant dimensions of impact. These are easier to monitor through Google News alerts that track mentions in other news media and blogs. Services such as Technorati and Wikio also track the “embeddedness” of online content based on the number and quality of links to the site. Though public media organizations are no doubt already using these conventional tools, more work, training, and dissemination is needed in making their use consistent and effective.

Finally, in thinking about tracking and measuring impact, there is one key caveat offered by our experts: *Impact metrics should be used in a balanced way in making editorial content decisions.* Said Tom Rosenstiel:

The data are a tool like any other tool. They offer potential, but they also offer risk. It’s a little like overnight ratings. To some significant degree, public broadcasting has always been immune from the pressure of nightly ratings because they’re not selling advertising...that’s going to change for public broadcasting online, when they are aware how much traffic they are getting and how traffic individual stories are getting. There is some evidence that the effect of this is to make people very focused on stories that drive traffic quickly...there’s a risk with these metrics that you will become ever more transitory; that you’ll gravitate less to the story that is important, but not popular; that over time it may lead to partisanship; because stories that reinforce people’s [ideology] and inflame prejudices do very well very quickly.

This is why, in crafting new impact measurements for public media, mission must trump metrics. By prioritizing and measuring social and civic outcomes rather than mass indicators, public media institutions will create journalism that better engages, serves and activates publics.

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