



The SPJ Digital Media Handbook

Part I

*By the members of the Society of Professional
Journalists' Digital Media Committee*

Published March 2010

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Four steps to building successful live streaming service on your news site

By JEFF ACHEN

I used to work for a TV station. I was the editor of a weekly newspaper. Now, I'm living in both worlds. I'm an online editor and multimedia journalist.

Of all the tools that seem to bridge the gap between broadcast and print journalist, live streaming has to be the most revolutionary. Today, any one person, let alone any given news organization, can broadcast video live out over the Internet using live streaming services such as Livestream.com or Ustream.tv for the cost of a simple video camera, laptop and a few video cables and accessories.

The ubiquity of broadcasting power brings with it a lot of trash that clogs the Internet. This is where journalists have the opportunity, and I would argue the responsibility, to more contentiously and professionally harness the medium.

Here are a few considerations:

1. **Set it up right.** Ensure your brand, your logo and your organization's live stream account looks good. Livestream.com allows you to upload a variety of logos to various positions like a 300×300 logo, 960×80 banner and 300×250 promo image. Take the time to ensure these are uploaded and that your "channel" looks good. It will say a lot about the professionalism of your news service.
2. **Thoughtfully consider how and what to live stream.** Should you live stream your local school board meeting? Too boring? Already available on the school district's Web site? How about live streaming a public debate your newspaper is hosting for the next election? There you go. Not everything is ideal for live streaming. Consider what people would take the time to watch and how timely it is. If you purchase a wireless card you could conceivably live stream from any location with a camera and laptop. This could open up great possibilities for your news organization. Cover the downtown fire live on the Web or an important press conference, all without the live satellite trucks those TV stations rely on.
3. **Market your live stream service.** Getting the audience is perhaps the hardest part of adding live streaming to your Web site. You need to find a place to embed your live stream player that people will be able to find. You also have to let them know that your Web site is the place to view the event live. Most people won't think to go to their local news site for this type of service. In the week leading up to the event, use every opportunity to let your Web site visitors know what you've got planned for the live event coverage. Then follow through consistently to let build your audience. Let them know that this is a service they can consistently rely on to be there for important live event coverage.

4. **Lastly, take full advantage of live stream host service options.** Livestream.com allows you to loop your videos in a replay format so even though your stream isn't live 24/7, the video of the last live event you covered is. And, make sure you approach live streaming with a "producer's" mindset. Use Livestream's graphics and titling to put up names and locations as needed during your live broadcast. Take advantage of the live chat function to engage with your audience during the live broadcast.

Live streaming is a new tool for news Web sites. When used effectively and to its full potential, this service can revolutionize the way you cover your community. One truly remarkable Web site that has taken full advantage of live streaming tools is www.theuptake.org. This site is a citizen journalism Web site that covers Minnesota politics through live video coverage. Imagine how your organization could do similar work.

Just remember, if approached half-heartedly, live stream services can flounder. Live streaming is about engagement. Consider carefully how it can enhance your coverage.

Print headlines often fail Web readers

By JENNIFER PEEBLES

“County to raise taxes on property.”

“Smith calls for cleanup of polluted site.”

“City to approve land-use plan tomorrow.”

Headlines like those work just fine for a newspaper — the print kind, the kind you pick up off your lawn in the morning and hold in your hands.

But they don’t work so well online. And that makes it harder for readers to find the content they’re looking for on your site.

When you hold the newspaper in your hands and your eye falls on a specific headline, the physical structure of the newspaper and the conventions of newspaper layout allow your brain to quickly put the headline in context.

For instance, imagine you pick up your newspaper and the headline says “County to raise taxes on property.”

Right under the headline is the lead of the story, which tells you a little bit more.

Maybe the lead starts off with a dateline for a specific city. That tells you even more.

There could be a picture next to the headline — a photo of the county mayor or commission voting to raise taxes.

And there could be other layout gewgaws near the headline that help your brain sort it all out — when I worked at a newspaper, the page designers made use of elements called “graybars,” basically short, column-wide boxes of gray shading with the name of the affected county in white letters. (Other papers probably have something similar in their page-designers’ toolboxes.)

Between the headline, the lead of the story, the photo, the dateline and the graybar, you can look at that story on the newspaper page and quickly discern what it is about and whether you want to read on or flip the page to the funnies.

But online, those headlines just don’t work for me. And I have a feeling they don’t work for a lot of other readers, too.

When you see a headline on a Web site, it is physically divorced from all those other newspaper elements. Online, there are no graybars to tell you what county is being discussed. Even on the Web site of a pick-it-up-off-the-lawn newspaper, you often can’t

see the lead, the dateline or the accompanying photo unless you click on the headline and start reading the story. (Maybe a couple of the biggest stories of the day will have photos with them, but for most of the stories, all you see on the newspaper homepage is the headline itself.)

And if the headline is divorced from such supporting elements online, then the marriage is totally annulled for news headlines being read through alternative delivery methods like RSS and Twitter.

An example: As an editor for a news Web site in Houston focusing on state and local government and freedom of information issues, I see scads of headlines every day through RSS (I'm a committed [Google Reader](#) user). And at least twice a day I see headlines like these:

“County to raise taxes on property.”

Uh, OK, which county? I can maybe understand this headline appearing in a very small newspaper that really covers only one county — but often these headlines are published in much larger papers that cover several counties. I can't help but think that newspaper's readers are just as confused as I when they see this headline online.

“Smith calls for cleanup of polluted site.”

OK, so, who's Smith? Is there only one guy named Smith in that town? Ditto on the polluted site — is this a town so small that it has only one? (I'm sure the newspaper had a graybar or a dateline or something else with that headline, but again, none of those show up with the headline online.)

“City to approve land-use plan tomorrow.”

Rerun: What city? Even most really, really tiny counties contain more than one city. (I clicked on a headline very similar to this the other day via an RSS feed from a small daily paper, assuming the headline was about the city in the newspaper's name. Come to find out, the city in question was a tiny city in the paper's circulation area.)

But this isn't a problem only for those of us who get our news through RSS. More and more people are reading their news on mobile devices, where Web pages can be slower to load — and where users are paying dearly for every second of time needed to download the page. I don't know about you, but when I'm surfing the Web on my Blackberry, I'm a bit choosier about what links I click on. That headline has to be really strong, and really precise, for me to click on it to read a story. I'm more likely to say to a headline with so-so interest, “I won't read you now — I'll try to read you later on, when I get home.” I don't have the extra time (or money!) to click on every headline that says “County to raise taxes” to find out what county is involved. I'm going to pass that story by. When I get home, I might check it out on my computer, or I might not.

All of those headlines are fine for the newspaper — that’s the way newspaper people have been trained to write headlines for decades now (Anybody out there bought one of those “Area Man” T-shirts from [The Onion](#)?) But headlines that work in traditional print media often don’t work online. Those of us who trained as newspaper people will find that our training, and our conventions, sometimes serve us poorly in the new digital sphere. Online, headlines have to stand on their own two feet.

How to show off your documents and PDFs online

By JENNIFER PEEBLES

There's nothing like the smell of documents in the morning: Great, powerful, telling documents — documents confirming that the mayor really was running a meth lab in the basement of City Hall. Or that the county commission chairman really was betting county workers' pension money on illicit goat-roping contests. Or that the police chief really did show up to work one day drunk, wearing only his boxer underwear, singing "[Tiptoe Through the Tulips](#)" in the style of [Tiny Tim](#).

So now that you've got these great documents, how do you show them off online?

One way is to upload the files directly to your Web server, either using your publication's content-management system or using an FTP program like [FileZilla](#) or, another one I've used sometimes, [CoffeeCup FTP](#).

But then there's also [Scribd.com](#), a free service that lets you upload PDFs and which converts them to Flash presentations. That's really cool because it means that readers can quickly scroll through a big PDF file and find some relevant page in the back without having to see that "downloading ... downloading ... downloading" message across their screen (and you know what I mean if you've ever had to upload a 600-page government report to your site. Why does the government always put the interesting stuff in the back of the reports?).

Using Scribd also means that those huge reports don't eat up a bunch of your Web server space, because the file is sitting on Scribd's servers. There's also some social networking capability to the site, too, so people can "friend" you and subscribe to your documents, and you can return the favor.

The site I work for, a nonprofit news site called [Texas Watchdog](#), [uses Scribd quite a bit](#). We like that we can upload a document and make it "private" — shielding it from access by the entire world, but allowing our reporters to access it via e-mailed invitations — and then quickly throw the switch to publish them to all the InterWebs when we're ready to publish our story.

Then there's also [Google Docs](#). Google Docs will let you upload and share a PDF with the world that's up to 10 megabytes. This service is also free.

(There may yet be other services out there for PDF-sharing — if you know of others that people should try, please comment below!)

So, once you've got your documents uploaded to the Web in some way, how do you present those documents online?

The easiest thing to do is simply link from the story text to the PDF in question.

I've seen people do bulleted lists of document links at the end of their stories, like this:

- PDF of the mayor's arrest report
- PDF of city workers' e-mails discussing the mayor's arrest
- PDF of the mayor's e-mails in which he says he "just loves making illegal meth"

But I'm not terribly jazzed about this approach. For one thing, you never know if a reader will read all the way to the end of the story to see those links.

Plus, it's inconvenient for the reader. If I come across a passage in the third graf that makes reference to a document, I might want to click on that document right then and see it for myself. My personal preference is to link phrases in the story to the documents to which they refer — a little bit like putting footnotes in a school term paper, only through the Web.

Scribd.com offers a fancier approach: It enables you to embed the Flash presentation of your document in the story text. I think this is just cool as heck, but I've had trouble getting it to work for readers using Internet Explorer. Some of them have told me they just see a big blob of white space on the page where the document is supposed to be. We stopped using the Scribd embed function after we heard that. I hope that eventually it will work for all browsers.

But here's something that's more reliable. You can use the front page of the document — or a picture that zooms in on one key phrase or passage in the document — as an art element in your story or post, and then make that art element a hyperlink to the PDF of the document.

When I worked in the [Tennessean](#) newsroom in Nashville, we used to call these "document tears" when they were used in the print edition — they looked like they had been torn from a document and put onto the newspaper page. So that's what I call these today when I create them for Texas Watchdog.

To create a document tear, you have at least two options. If you have access to [Adobe Photoshop](#) or other picture-editing software, you should be able to open the PDF file in Photoshop and simply save the first page of the PDF as a .jpg file. (If you want to spotlight one passage in the document, you can use the crop tool to cut out all the rest of the picture.) Then you can save the file for publication on the Web (72 dpi, I believe) and upload the newly created .jpg like any other photograph you might use on your site.

If you don't have Photoshop or another photo editing program that will open a PDF, you can also do it the old-fashioned way: Get out the digital camera and take picture of the piece of paper. Then download that photo from the camera, crop it as needed and upload it to your site.

After you've got the picture of the document, or the document tear, uploaded, insert it at the requisite spot in the story text. Then, go back and get the URL of the PDF file of the

document — whether it's on your Web server, on Scribd or stored as a Google Doc — and copy that URL into the clipboard. Now, switch back over to where you're working in the story text and wrap the "A HREF=" HTML tags around the .jpg of the document tear so that the picture file itself becomes a hyperlink to the document URL.

But I'm sure those aren't the only ways to present documents online. What are some of the tips you can share with our readers?

Using social networks as reporting tools

By AMANDA MAURER

If you had to find someone stuck in traffic on an expressway during a snow storm for a story, could you do it?

Chicago Tribune reporter [James Janega](#) did.

Finding that source could have been a difficult task, but James knew he had options. He logged in to Twitter, did a quick search, and soon found a woman who was tweeting while sitting in traffic. He messaged her on Twitter and soon they were chatting by phone. Within minutes James had the source and information he needed.

Social networks like Facebook and Twitter are excellent resources when searching for sources and story ideas. Of course, once a source is found on a social network, it's the journalist's responsibility to do the proper checks to verify who that person claims to be, and follow up with a proper interview in person or over the phone. Nevertheless, these sites can help you find folks by interest, profession, location and more, which means it's increasingly important for us to come up with best practices when using these sites.

[Dozens of organizations](#), including The Associated Press and the [BBC](#), have created their own social media policies. If you're interested in using social networks to find sources, I'd recommend chatting with your editor to learn more about your own newsroom's view on this. At the *Chicago Tribune* we have our own social media guidelines that I view as best practices. Many of the guidelines echo our newsroom editorial principles: truth and integrity, objectivity and accountability, and proper sourcing.

If your newsroom embraces the idea of finding sources via social networks, you're in luck. There are a number of sites that will help you find exactly who you're searching for.

Six easy ways to find sources:

- [Twitter search](#) – This is the advanced version of the Twitter search you can perform on your Twitter homepage. You can search for folks based on Tweet keyword, by username, by location, date, attitude and more. This is your best option if you're trying to find that [person stuck in traffic](#).
- If you like Twitter search, also try [Twazzup](#). It's similar to Twitter search, but it also displays popular links related to that search term, suggested users, news, photos and more.
- [Twellow](#) – “The Twitter Yellow Pages” allow you to search for users by their bios' keywords and general interests. It's perfect for finding folks interested in a certain beat or hobby, like [photography](#).
- Try [Twellowhood](#) to search by interest and location.
- If you like Twellow, also try [WeFollow](#), which also lists users by interest.

- [Facebook search](#) – Facebook has been working on its search abilities the past few months, and now it allows you to search by people, posts by friends (including photos, links, status updates, notes and more), groups and Web results.

Have you used these tools before? Do you have your own favorites? Let us know!

Sharing news has never been easier: A word about user-generated content

By HILARY FOSDAL

News has always been something people shared – whether over the dinner table or the water cooler. Today [UGC](#) (user-generated content) applications make it easier than ever for people to share what is newsworthy to them online. Instead of being passive consumers of the news, viewers can join the conversation by uploading and submitting images and videos of local community events.

UGC is not a new concept. For example, letters to the editor have been around for quite some time. However, the ease of use, low cost (typically free or free with online registration) and availability of UGC is increasing the amount of citizen-journalism content being generated.

Luckily for budding citizen-journalists, these days it's hard to find a local news organization that isn't promoting its user-generated content application.

With news organizations around the nation suffering financially – having thousands of feet on the street potentially shooting the next “it” story – there is a lot to get excited about when it comes to UGC.

There are also some concerns ... Below is an excerpt of my interview with former WGN radio news director [Wes Bleed](#) addressing the topics of UGC, citizen-journalism and the news-gathering process. (Note: If you're viewing this handbook via Scribd.com, [click on this link to go to the video on YouTube.](#))

Q. As a former news director, how do you view user-submitted photo and video content?

A: Using user-submitted content is always something that I would be hesitant about in the sense that you just don't know where it's coming from. Well, you might know where it's coming from, but you might not have a handle on how you got it. Did you get it because somebody had just simply gone out and shot video or recorded sound and did nothing else but just send it to you? Or was there some kind of editing in the pre-stages before you got it? Well, if that's the case, then now you don't really know just what you ended up with. So that's always a problem.

You also don't know necessarily how reliable the person is. Again, is it just Joe Citizen trying to be a good guy? Or is it somebody trying to get his name out there to get attention for himself? So on and so forth. So I have a lot of questions about it. Now, having said all the downsides, now the upside is you can get people involved. You can get some very interesting shots, stills, video, perhaps some kind of [\(Zapruder\)-type film](#) that nobody else would possibly have. So you never want to dismiss it out of hand, but you just have to be very careful about it. So that's my big thing, be careful about it. Try to figure out where it came from. At the same time, embrace the possibilities that it does present.

When news organizations embrace UGC-submitted content, they make users more loyal and encourage users to be more engaged with the Web site. One of the added values of news organizations promoting and highlighting UGC submissions is that it builds brand preference with viewers offline – beyond the airwaves, beyond the broadcast, and beyond a Web site.

Looking to inspire citizen-journalists in your community? Wes Bleed informs citizen-journalists of what it takes to make it from the UGC platform to the broadcast. (Note: If you're reading this handbook via Scribd.com, [click here to go directly to the video on YouTube.](#))

Q: If there is a citizen-journalist who is watching this and they want to know how will their content make the cut. Instead of being just user-submitted content, it makes it

onto the air or makes it onto the Web site and it gets highlighted in some fashion. What qualities or how would you evaluate a user-submitted content that would make the cut that would go beyond just the user-generated platform?

A: I think it has to be the unique value of what that is. If a tornado rolls through your town and you happened to have your camera in the car and, instead of taking cover, you take a moment to video the tornado and nobody else does ... Your video is going to be used all over the place, my guess is. If many people are shooting and recording and video-ing certain things, then the best is going to be used and yours may be pushed down in terms of that unique quality. So, I think it all has to do with the story. With the interest in the story and certainly with your unique offering.

Are you the first on the scene? Are you like the guy that Twittered the first photo of the plane in the Hudson? Everybody saw that. And it was because it was unique and timely and it was of a very perishable nature, in the sense that that scene, nobody else could get because the plane was sinking. So that was a terrific shot. It all goes back to, again, what else is there? What's the story? What's the interest level? And what did you provide?

Several examples of UGC applications:

- [Ning](#)
- [KickApps](#)
- [Crowdvine](#)
- [GoingOn](#)

Learning the new digital media tools on a budget. Here's how ...

By REBECCA AGUILAR

I've been asked by many reporters how much it cost me to learn how to design a Web site, edit digital video, use Photoshop, produce digital slideshows, and now create animated graphics and logos. Well, it was cheaper than you think.

Almost two years ago, I went full force learning everything I could about multimedia tools right after I lost my television reporting job in Dallas. I thought I needed to learn more, but for as little money as possible. My husband is supporting us, but I didn't want him to think I was going hog wild on my spending.

I "Googled" everything, and quickly learned there were many multimedia and digital media workshops being taught by professionals. I thought wonderful until I saw the **price** for a one-week workshop. Digital video classes in New York City were one thousand bucks! Photoshop classes were nothing cheap. Video editing classes in Los Angeles were also a hefty price. This didn't include hotel and airfare expense.

So I put my reporting skills to work and started looking in my backyard. I found a community college in Dallas that offered all the classes I needed. I've now taken three Web design classes, one Photoshop class, and currently I'm working on two animation classes. And guess what? Each class has cost me \$124 dollars.

Do the math; I've spent a little over \$700 on six classes. Remember, I found classes for \$1,000 for ONE WEEK. So there's no need to spend lots of money on learning the new digital media.

Here's another tip if you don't have a community college in your area offering you what you need. A videographer friend asked me to do a workshop for some of his clients. I told him I'd do it for free if he taught me the basics of Final Cut Pro. He got something and I got something. When all else fails — share your talents.

I do have my "special class money" jar where I have funds saved up for that one class I know I need to spend a little extra on. My choice is the Poynter Institute. I'm headed there this week, and will blog in the near future about my experience there.

Until next time!

Scanning, shrinking and blacking out: Working with PDFs

By JENNIFER PEEBLES

When I worked at [a mid-sized daily newspaper](#), we had a simple process for getting PDFs of documents posted on the Web: Paper clip them together, put a Post-It note on them describing what they were, and hand them to someone in the Online Department. As if by magic, they appeared the next day online, hyperlinked from our story.

But I left the mid-sized daily newspaper a year ago to work with two friends at [a startup online newspaper](#). And I've had to get educated in a hurry about making PDFs.

I suspect a lot of y'all out there are in the same boat as I was, so I'll try to share with you some things I learned the hard way.

If you're like us at all, you do a lot with PDFs — our focus is on local and state government and government transparency, so we get a lot of public records and post them online, including [government officials' calendars](#), [their e-mails](#), their [annual ethics forms](#), you name it. Most of these come to us as paper documents that we have to scan in — and scanning them in can create massive PDF files that are unwieldy, both for us and for our readers.

But I got educated about something called optimization. Basically, optimizing a PDF crunches down the file size — I've seen it reduce the size of a PDF to just a third of what it was. (I'm not an expert, but I think it largely involves tossing out some of the data associated with the blank white spaces on the paper document.)

Optimizing PDFs is awesome. We went from posting huge files that choked our readers' browsers to much more manageable file sizes that are quicker for people to download and read.

So, how do you optimize? I'm afraid you can't do it in the free Acrobat Reader program. But here are two for-pay programs that can do it (notice: I am not a paid spokesman for either manufacturer.) One is the pro version of Adobe Acrobat, which I think right now is version 9.0. It retails for about \$699 and is also included in the full version of the [Adobe Creative Suite 4](#) package (which retails for about \$2,400, I think). It gives you some options in terms of how much image quality will be lost when it crunches down the file.

Another program, one that's much cheaper, is [Nitro PDF](#). It sells for about \$99 a copy. Nitro can also do optimize. (Note: I am not a paid spokesman for either project, just a user.)

But those aren't the only cool things that those programs can do that will help journalists.

Another cool feature of both programs is that they'll allow you to combine multiple PDFs into one file. This is really handy when you're trying to scan in some 800 pages of printouts from the mayor's calendar but the document feeder on your scanner will only take 25 pages at a time: Generate one PDF for each 25 pages, and when you're all done scanning, combine them all into one file.

And both programs will allow you to remove pages from a PDF file — handy for when you accidentally get, say, a freelancer's invoice mixed up in the pile of pages from the mayor's calendar being scanned in. Just delete that one page of the freelancer invoice from the PDF. Or, "extract" the freelancer invoice and save it as its own PDF.

Both programs will also allow you to reorder pages within PDFs — handy for when you accidentally put April 19 after the April 20 page before you stick the whole sheaf into the scanner.

And Acrobat has one other really handy feature that Nitro does not have: Redaction — it has a small toolbox of gizmos that let you black out stuff.

Now, I know what you're thinking — we're journalists, we hate redaction! Why would we redact something? Well, what about a source who leaks you a document via fax? You might not want to display that person's name and fax number to the whole world. Or say you get a document through a public records request that has someone's Social Security number on it — the records custodian was supposed to redact it before he/she gave it to you, but it slipped through, and now you have it. Unless someone can give me some really good journalistic reason for it, I tend to be reluctant to blast that person's Social all over the InterWebs. My initial instinct is, let's black out their Social before we post the PDF file. (And there are other programs that will redact as well — search under "PDF redaction" on Google and they'll turn up.)

I'm far from being a PDF expert. That's why I'm still working my way through a copy of the *Adobe Acrobat Bible*. But what I've learned so far has saved me a lot of headaches.

TechTherapy: What is a 3G network and why is it on my mobile phone? Do I want it? What is tethering?

By STEVE FOSDAL

The most accurate answer is that a 3G network is one that follows an international standard for wireless communications (see: [IMT-2000](#)). Unfortunately, this is not the most helpful answer. As journalists, this may happen to you often, getting technically correct answers that don't address what the question is really about. The goal of this column is to help correct that.

So, now for the better, more helpful, answer.

3G is a third-generation data network that lets you get online using your mobile phone. Yes, you want it. Tethering is one of the cooler things that can be done with a 3G mobile phone. (Note: If you're reading this handbook on Scribd.com, [click this link to go directly to the video on YouTube.](#))

Source: [IceFlowStudios, YouTube Channel](#)

A 3G network is a data network that allows (relatively) high-speed data to be transferred wirelessly to and from your mobile phone. A data network is what lets you get online. If you can operate a Web browser on your mobile phone, you have a data network plan.

There are alternatives to 3G; most are slower, like for example, [EDGE](#). Check out the YouTube video to the right for a side-by-side speed comparison.

Which data networks (2G, 2.5G, 3G, EDGE, etc.) are available depends on which provider you choose (AT&T, Sprint, Verizon, etc.) and which mobile phone you choose (iPhone, BlackBerry Curve, etc).

All mobile phones are not created equal. I've never seen a mobile phone with a data plan that doesn't have a Web browser, but whether or not you'll be able to record video and upload it to YouTube (and how long that will take) is something you'll need to verify with your carrier.

One of the more tech-tastic things that some data plans/mobiles support is tethering.

Tethering is what you are doing when you connect your mobile phone, either via Bluetooth or through USB, to your computer and the mobile phone shares its data network with your computer. Once that happens, you should be able to use your computer as though it were online. The network speed won't be as fast as it would be on a land line, but you'll have access to all the online tools you are used to.

Tethering is **definitely** not something every plan/phone supports. If you want to be able to do this, check with your carrier.

Things are always changing in the tech world so it's good to keep your eye on new developments.

Here are some I'm watching: Tethering is becoming more and more popular so I think more carriers are going to support it, some sooner than others. Also not so far off are 4G networks. Promising faster speed, 4G networks should be very popular.

Want to read more?

- [Wikipedia: 4G Networks](#)
- [Sprint 4G Networks](#)
- [Sprint 4G/3G Routers Support Up to 32 Simultaneous Wi-Fi Connections](#)
- [iPhone: Cellular Data Network Access](#)
- [AT&T Upgrading 3G Network](#)

Pound signs on Twitter: How to Tweet more effectively by using hashtags

By JENNIFER PEEBLES

For all of my ink-stained friends out there who are trying, trying, trying to “get” The Twitter — and you are many, I know — I’m gonna explain what those darn pound signs (“#”) are about in Twitter messages and how you can put them to use.

But first, a story.

When I first signed up for a Twitter account, I thought it would be a cool way for me to share what I was doing with a fairly small circle of good friends.

I kept my Tweets “protected” and only visible to people I knew and trusted — after all, it seemed to me that Twitter was only good for telling your friends what you were doing *right then*, like “I’m eating my Froot Loops” or “I’m having a colonoscopy.” What if what I was doing was standing in line at the cash register at Home Depot — did I want the entire world to know that they could go rob my house?

But Twitter has grown into something much more useful than that. Not only are people now using it to share their thoughts with thousands of people on their “follower” lists, they can also share their thoughts with people on Twitter who aren’t even following them and don’t know them from the man in the moon.

Twitter isn’t just about telling your closest pals that you’re almost done putting out the fire that broke out on your Snuggie sleeve when you reached over a lit candle to grab the remote. Twitter is allowing people in faraway places to tell us, in real-time, about the censorship and repression going on in their countries. It’s allowing people to share political commentary here at home and to share links, thoughts, bon mots and smart remarks about any topic under the sun. All through a handy device called a hashtag.

A hashtag on Twitter is like a keyword that you stick in your Tweet text — by putting a pound sign in front of it, you signal to the reader that it’s a keyword.

Then, as you read a stream of Tweets, you can see who’s Tweeting on the same topic by quickly looking for the same hashtag to show up. Or, you can search for that hashtag [via Twitter’s own search engine](#) to find everyone in the Twitter-verse who’s Tweeting on that subject.

For instance, several bloggers and Twitter folks we follow here at [Texas Watchdog](#) attended and live-Tweeted some meetings earlier this year of the Texas State Board of Education, which had garnered national attention by getting into an evolution-versus-creationism debate. Some of those folks were progressive bloggers, some were

conservative bloggers. They had travelled to the meeting in Austin from numerous locations across Texas. But we were able to easily keep track of what was being said by all of them by searching on the hashtag of #txsboe.

In fact, by searching for that hashtag, we could see everyone in the entire world who was Tweeting about the Texas Board of Ed, even if they were in Timbuktu and had only read about the debate in, say, the *Timbuktu Times*.

There are hashtags for just about everything these days, some used to a great extent, some not.

If you're Tweeting about a topic that's hot in the news today, you might include #hcr for "health care reform." Or #publicoption. Or #economy. Or #stimulus. Or just #politics.

If you're a Tweeting from a red-state perspective, you might end your Tweet with #tcot for "top conservatives on Twitter." The folks in the blue-state perspective might end with #tpot ("top progressives on Twitter" — also #topprog), while libertarians have #tlot. (And Texas conservatives have created their own, "#txcot.")

And you can create your own. We're an online newspaper covering government in Texas, and we saw a lot of people using #txpolitics. But that's a broad topic, so we started using #txlege just for Tweets about the legislature. Now, I know several frequent Twitter folks who use #txlege. (How do you create a new hashtag? Easy. Just use it in a Tweet. Go one better and send out a Tweet encouraging other Tweeple to use it, too.)

Schools have theirs — Tweeting about the Aggies? End your Tweet with #TAMU. Places, too — there's #houston and, for our state capital, #ATX.

Groups and events can have them, such as #spj for the Society of Professional Journalists (the people who brought you this blog). And when SPJ held its recent national convention in Indianapolis, celebrating SPJ's 100th birthday, Tweets specific to the conference were hashtagged as #spj100.

There are hashtags for causes, too — environmental hashtags include #sierraclub, #nocoal and, if you don't mind some mild profanity in your hashtags, #cleancoalmyass.

For open government issues, there's #opengov, #transparency and #FOIA. We also started #txfoi for Texas-related open government issues.

What's your best hashtag use-case?

What can Google Wave do for you?

By AMANDA MAURER

Now that I have received my [Google Wave](#) invitation, I'm finally exploring all of its possibilities — and so far I'm excited.

After playing around with my account and exploring on the Web, it looks like a great tool to use when communicating and collaborating with others — whether that means planning an event, working on a project or sharing notes. Each message, or Wave, is considered part conversation and part document, which allows users to chat in real time, drag and drop documents, “playback” a message to see what was said when and more. (See more features below!) The creators designed Wave after asking themselves “What would e-mail look like if it was created today (instead of 40 years ago)?”

Unfortunately, because of everything Wave offers, there does seem to be a learning curve. However, I'm excited to see how Wave can increase productivity.

If you're interested in all that Wave offers, [check out the 80-minute developer presentation from May](#). Yes, it is a bit long, but they really do explain how everything works quite well. Meanwhile, if you're looking for a shorter video to give you the gist, try this snippet below. (Note: If you're viewing this handbook on Scribd.com, [click this link to go directly to the video on YouTube](#).)

Want to know more? Here are some highlights:

- Wave combines “plain vanilla e-mails” with instant messaging. This means that you can see what your friends are typing in real time, which cuts out all of the time you waste waiting to hear back.

- Wave automatically corrects spelling errors by taking into account a word's context. Another option automatically translates your message (as you type!) into your choice of 40 languages.
- There's a playback option, which allows a user to see when conversations, comments and edits were made.
- You can drag and drop files (images, etc.) into a Wave.
- Multiple users can edit a Wave at once; edits will appear to all users in real time.
- You can insert gadgets into a Wave, including a "Yes, No, Maybe" gadget, a map gadget and more.
- Third-party developers are creating "robots," or applications that increase what you can do in a Wave (translators, URL shorteners, etc.)
- Thanks to the Google Wave API, there's the option to embed Waves on Web pages and blogs. Any changes you make to the Wave will be automatically updated on the Web, and any comments made on the Web will show up on the original Wave.

For more reading, check out:

- [Google Wave: A complete guide](#)
- [How to: Get started with Google Wave](#)
- [Google Wave: 5 ways it could change the Web](#)

Screencasting in no time

By HILARY FOSDAL

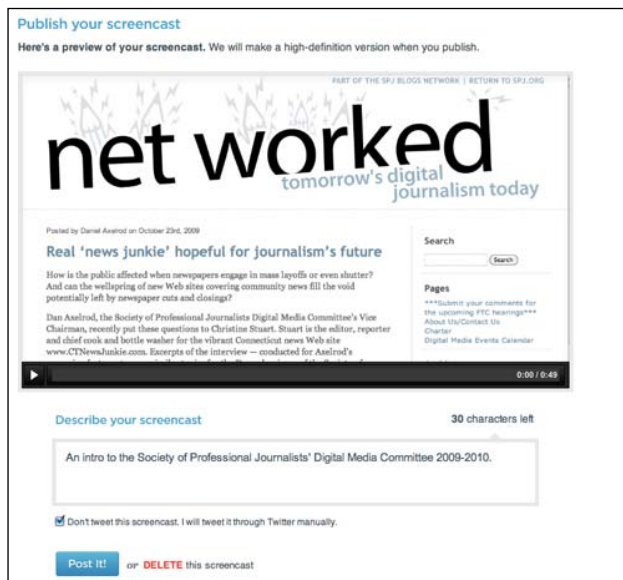
Did you ever want to take a screen-grab of a Web site or an image on your computer, add a voice-over and share it with a friend?

Sounds complicated, right? You'd need audio equipment and software that performed screen-grabs and a lot of other things that you probably aren't even aware of needing.

Well, now you can create Web-based recordings using [Screenr](#) in a matter of seconds using either a Mac or a PC.

How to create, publish and share a screencast

- Go to Screenr – <http://screenr.com/>.
- Click “Record your screencast now!”
- You will be asked to give Screenr access to your computer.
- Now you are ready to screencast!



A small framing window pops up with instructions on how to record your screencast.

1. Move and resize the frame.
2. Click the red button to record.
3. Press DONE when finished.

Tip: The smaller you keep the frame, the clearer your screencast will appear when viewed.

Please note: All screencasts are viewable by the general public.

You can add voice-overs to slideshows, screencast a .mov file and a whole lot more.

Screenr will record up to 5 minutes of material.

Oh, and in case I didn't mention, it's free!

Once you have clicked “Done,” you'll be taken to a screen that will prompt you to write a 140-character description of your screencast.

Upload your finished product to your Twitter account or post it on your blog.

My favorite feature: You can preview and delete your Screenr if you don't like how it turned out.

Sharing your content just got a little easier.

The ‘one-man band’ checklist

By REBECCA AGUILAR

The reality is we’re all becoming what’s called a “one-man band” reporter. Also known as a mobile journalist (mojo), a backpack journalist or a digital correspondent. We’ll do it all: shoot video, take photographs, interview, report, write, video edit, Twitter and blog. I’ll be honest, it can be overwhelming, especially if you’re being asked to provide a video story with your print or online story.

Bonnie Gonzalez is a one-man-band reporter for an Austin television station. She’s given us a few pointers to share with everyone who finds themselves in the same situation; having to shoot video for a story. Here’s a simple list we’ve put together. One that we hope you’ll put in your back pocket and use.

1. Check your equipment before you head out the door

- Batteries -- make sure they’re charged.
- Tapes/memory cards -- bring extras.
- Audio equipment -- lav, stick mic, receivers for the wireless mics and wind screens.
- Tripod.
- Light kit -- make sure you have extra bulbs. Throw a flashlight in the kit. It comes in handy.
- Laptop computer and connections to ingest or capture video at any location.
- Flip camera for emergencies when your video camera is not cooperating or crashes.
- Rain cover for your video camera. You don’t want it getting wet, because that causes big problems.
- Lens cleaner.

2. Protection for yourself. You never know where you’ll end up.

- Sunscreen
- Insect repellent
- Rubber boots -- for rainy, muddy days
- Rain jacket
- First aid kit
- Water
- Ruler -- just in case you have to measure snow or water for a story or size of hail.
- Extra change of clothes
- Extra notebooks

3. Communication equipment

- Work cell phone -- make sure it's charged
- Personal cell phone
- Car cell phone charger
- Phone numbers and notes for your story
- Phone book -- you never know when you'll need the yellow pages.

4. Basic equipment and short cuts

- Pen and notepad: You should always have these basic tools with you, especially if your equipment breaks down.
- Write down time codes: Save yourself time by writing down the time code of a sound bite or quote you plan to use in your video story.

4. Manage time wisely

- Pre-interview people before you meet them. You can just jump into the interview when you get with them face-to-face and not waste time warming them up or wasting tape. The less tape you use, the less video you have to capture. Remember, computers capture video on real time.

5. Don't hesitate to ask for help

- You're on breaking news and you're carrying all your gear. It's OK to ask someone to help carry the tripod. You'll be surprised how people will volunteer to help. They will even hold the microphone if you want them to during an interview.

Everyone has their own style, their own pace, and their own methods. This is just a short checklist to get you into your groove. Good luck!

A beginner's guide to Twitter

By AMANDA MAURER

Twitter, a microblogging site, can be a great resource for journalists looking for additional ways to find story ideas and sources, as well as share content. It's similar to an instant-messaging chat room in that you can interact in real time with millions of folks who share your interests. It's a useful tool because it can show you what its millions of users are chatting about online.

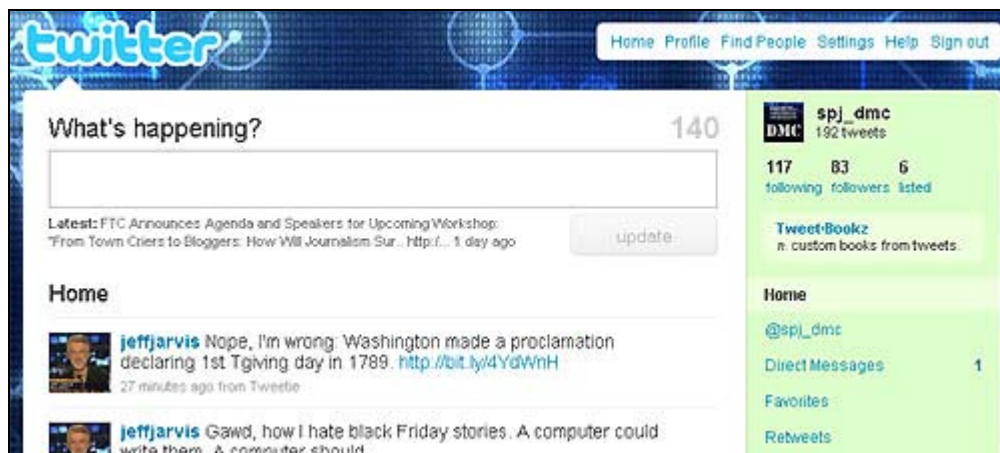
How to sign up and get started:

- Visit <http://twitter.com> and click "Sign up now."
- Enter your full name, username, password, e-mail and CAPTCHA. Click "Create my account."
- You'll be taken to a page to "See if your friends are on Twitter." You can pass on this for now – there's a small link under the box to skip it. You'll next be taken to a page of recommended users. If there are any you'd like to receive updates from, click the check box next to the account's photo, then click "Finish."

Your home page, settings:

Welcome to your home page. The box under "What's happening?" is where you'll type and send your messages. Below that, you may see tweets, or messages, from another user. You can unsubscribe to those tweets later.

Along the right side of your home page you'll see your username and a spot for your photo. Below your username you'll see how many tweets you've sent, the number of users you're following (subscribed to), the number of users that are following you, and how many lists you've been added to.



Going down the list, you'll see a number of links. You're currently at "Home." Clicking @YourUsername will show you a list of all public tweets with your username in it. "Direct messages" will take you to your inbox and outbox for private messages. We'll get to Favorites and ReTweets later.

You can fill out your account by clicking "Settings" at the top right of the Twitter page. Under "Account," you can add a URL (can be your Web site or publication), one-line bio and your location (city). Click "Save."

Under "Notices," you can turn off e-mail and newsletter notifications. You may want to turn these off if you plan to be active on Twitter.

Lastly, click "Picture" to upload an image.

Adding friends:

There are several ways to find folks you want to subscribe to – or follow – on Twitter.

- Click "Find People" at the top right of the Twitter page. You can search by a person's Twitter username or name; you can also find them by their e-mail account.
- Use a directory of Twitter users. You can search for accounts by location and topic of interest. Some popular sites include [Twellow](#), [WeFollow](#) and [JustTweetIt](#).
- Follow a user's list. Visit [Mashable](#) to learn more about Twitter lists.

Removing friends: On your home page, click "Following." This will show you a list of every user you've subscribed to. Click the cog button, then click "Unfollow."

Tweeting 101:

There are a number of ways for you to send messages on Twitter:

Tweet: A tweet is a message sent out to the Twitter community. These tweets can be read by your followers and those who visit your profile. These messages are limited to 140 characters, which can create some challenges, especially when sharing links. To help with this, try using a link shortener like [bit.ly](#).

Google Translate Adds As-You-Type Translations, Phonetic Pronunciation <http://bit.ly/1izxJE>
11:24 AM Nov 17th from web

Sending a message to someone: You can send a message to other users by beginning the tweet with that person's username.



Sending a private message: There are two ways to send a private, or direct, message. One option is to click “Direct Messages” in the right rail. You can choose who you want to message by using the pull-menu. The other option is to go to your home page and begin a message by typing a “D” followed by the username.



Retweet: A retweet is when someone copies, pastes, attributes and sends out another’s Tweet. Visit [Mashable](#) to find out more about ReTweets.

Favorite: You can Favorite, or save, tweets that you’d like to see again by hovering over the original tweet and clicking the star on the right side.

Other Twitter Tips

Hashtags: Using hashtag terms are one way Twitter users organize Tweets. By using the same hashtag term, users can find Tweets about one subject easily in search. The more popular a hashtag terms become, the more likely it is to pop up in Twitter’s trending topics.

Lists: Lists allow users to organize their followers into certain groups. By adding friends to these lists, you can view a stream of just their Tweets.

Twitter etiquette

- Twitter users may not automatically follow you. To build an audience, take the first step by following others with similar interests as you.
- Similarly, if folks do follow you, follow them back. (Of course if it’s a spam account, or something of that nature, there’s no need.)
- Twitter’s a two-way street. If you want people to respond to your Tweets, you have to respond to others’ Tweets.
- Be conscious of how often you Tweet. If you’re having a multiple-Tweet conversation with another user, you may want to direct message one another so you don’t clog up your friends Twitter streams.

Read about more [Twitter etiquette recommendations](#). For more info on Twitter, visit [Mashable's Twitter Guide](#).

How to create an interactive Google Map

By HILARY FOSDAL

The first thing you'll need to do is create a free Google Account. [Click here to create a free Google account.](#)

If you already have a Google Account created, go to <http://maps.google.com>

Once you have logged into your account, in the upper-left corner you'll see the words "My Maps."



Click on "Create new map" to get started building a new interactive and embeddable Google map.

Give it a title and a description so you can easily identify it the next time you want to reference it. You'll see why this is important in a moment.

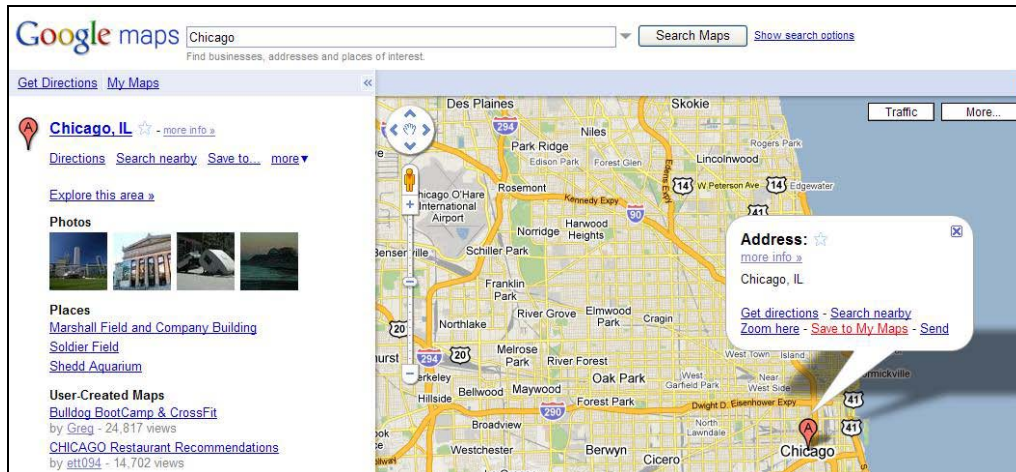
Decide whether you want your map to be displayed publicly or only with people you choose to share the map's URL.

Click "Save."

Type into the search field the address of the location you want to add to your map.

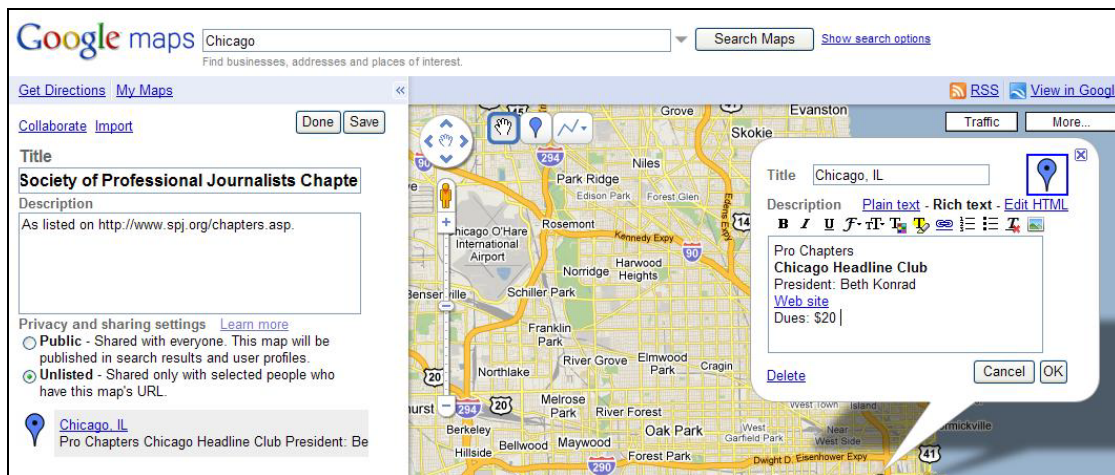
For example, I will type in "Chicago" and click "Search Map," and a red balloon appears on the city of Chicago along with a bubble with more information on Google maps.

Click "Save to My Maps."



A box will prompt you to choose the title of the map you want to save this address in. This is where you realize how and what you titled your maps can help you tag addresses faster.

The bubble will expand to include a field for you to input a description of the address.



This gives you an opportunity to explain why this address is important to your user.

Advanced step:

You can choose to use either [plain text](#), [rich text](#) or HTML to add information. There is also a mini [WYSIWIG](#) (what you see is what you get) editor to assist you in adding photos, hyperlink text and much more.

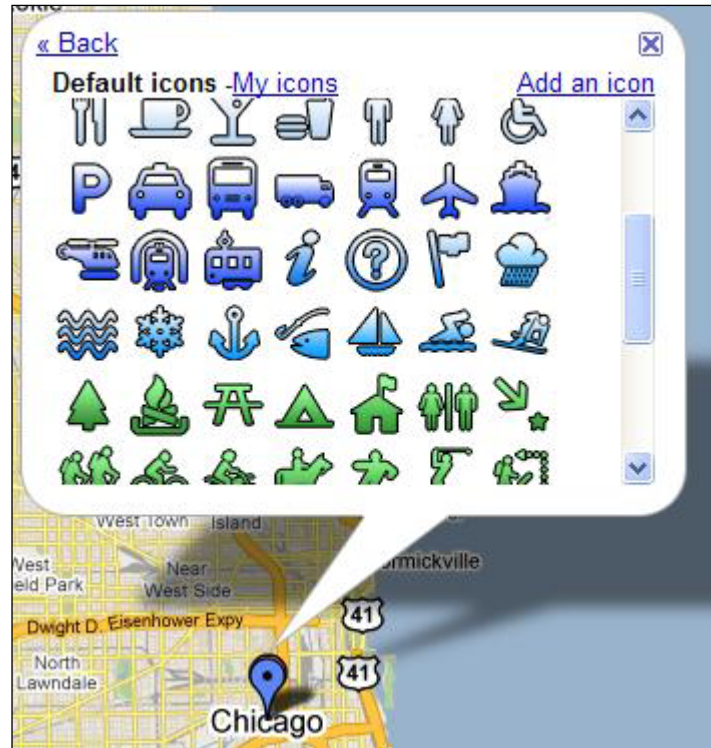
You can also change the icon that points to the address. Instead of a red or blue balloon you can choose from one of many Google “default icons.”

Advanced step:

You can create and add your own icons to your Google maps by clicking “add an icon.”

Scroll down on the left-hand side on the Google maps where it says “Hide” and un-check any addresses you might have erroneously typed to make them disappear from your map.

To embed your Google Map into a blog or Web site click on the word “Link” in the upper-right corner.



Copy the HTML code and paste it to embed into your Web site.



Advanced step:

You can customize how your map is displayed even further by clicking on “Customized and preview embedded map.”

Here are some fun examples of Google maps:

- [Report on Halted Development in Your Neighborhood](#)
- [Grand Theft Auto IV Locations](#)
- [myFOX Pets: Pet-Friendly Places](#) (myFoxdfw.com has created a number of interactive Google maps you can check out)

Try it: Windows Live Writer for blog publishing

By JESSICA DURKIN

A funny thing happened when I was learning all about WordPress this month at their WordCamp in New York City: I stumbled upon a new Windows desktop application available for [download](#) that was created to make blogging easier.

As WordCamp attendees stampeded to an SEO workshop, I attended a [Live Writer \(beta\)](#) presentation by Dani Diaz, a Microsoft developer out of Philadelphia.

The first question Dani posed to the audience was: “How many of you time-out of your online session and lose your material when you are blogging?” My hand shot up.

With WYSIWYG authoring, Live Writer allows bloggers to create posts on their desktop with all the capabilities of blogging software. The settings allow users to transfer posts from Live Writer to major blogging software accounts, fully formatted to that software. That is, you can set Live Writer, for instance, to WordPress, Blogger, TypePad, etc., formatting and when you have completed your post, just send the whole thing over and it will be posted to your account. You can do this with countless blogging accounts by adjusting the Live Writer settings to tell the post where to go.

Here’s how the company explains it on their blog:

Windows Live Writer is a desktop application that makes it easier to compose compelling blog posts using [Windows Live Spaces](#) or your current blog service.

Blogging has turned the Web into a [two-way](#) communications medium. Our goal in creating Writer is to help make blogging more powerful, intuitive, and fun for everyone.

Among the features:

- Integrate text and multi-media to the working Live Writer page
- Integrate live links. Frequently used links recur automatically as you type them.
- Set publishing schedules. (This one was popular with the crowd.)

Live Writer was also built for full compatibility with Windows Live application.

Digital slideshows: The extra nugget for your online news story

By REBECCA AGUILAR

The first time I saw a digital slideshow in the *Washington Post*, I knew I wanted to make that part of my multimedia tool kit. I am not a professional photographer, but that hasn't stopped me from figuring out which cameras and software to use to produce a digital slideshow.

I believe a slideshow is that extra nugget you need to go along with your written report. I produce digital slideshows when my assignment is very visual. I mean when there is a lot of action and reaction going on.

Here's one I produced for pegasusnews.com. It took me just under two hours to shoot the photos and conduct my interviews. Then it took me 40 minutes to put together the slideshow. (Note: If you're reading this handbook on Scribd.com, [click this link to go directly to the slideshow on Vimeo.com](#).)

Stepping in the Right Direction from [Rebecca Aguilar](#) on [Vimeo](#)

Digital slideshows help the reader “experience” the story. It makes them feel like they were right there when you were covering the assignment. In many ways they're like the video stories I produced for my television reports.

Types of digital slideshows

A digital slideshow can be very simple or it can have many layers to it. One story can be produced in different ways by just the elements you use in the slideshow. A digital slideshow can include the following combinations:

1. Only photos
2. Photos and text
3. Photos and music

4. Photos and soundbites (interviews)
5. Photos and reporter voice-over
6. Photos, music and text
7. Photos, music, and reporter voice-over
8. Photos, music and soundbites
9. Photos, music, text, and reporter voice-over
10. Photos, music, text and soundbites
11. Photos, music, text, soundbites and reporter voice-over
12. Photos, music, text, soundbites, reporter voice-over and ambient sound (background sound like traffic, etc.)
13. Photos, text, soundbites, reporter voice-over and ambient sound

Here's a digital slideshow I produced for pegasusnews.com with photos, soundbites, music and reporter voice-over. (Note: If you're reading this handbook on Scribd.com, [click this link to go directly to the slideshow on Vimeo.com.](#))

[Dallas police — "New Life Opportunities"](#) from [Alex Bentley](#) on [Vimeo](#)

The more digital slideshows you produce the better you'll get at **visualizing** what you want and how to get the best results. I get many of my ideas and inspirations from looking at other digital slideshows being produced by newspapers and online news sites. [The Washington Post](#) and The [Minneapolis-St. Paul Star Tribune](#) are my favorites.

Do you need an expensive camera or software to produce a quality slideshow? Not really, but I'll cover that and free software you can use in my **next blog**.

Facebook Pages 101

By AMANDA MAURER

If you're looking to grow the audience for your newspaper, magazine, station or Web site, you may want to create a Facebook page.

If you already have your own Facebook profile, don't worry – setting up a Facebook page is quite similar.

Facebook pages are similar to profiles in that they have friends (called fans), walls, offer the option to add pictures and are super easy to update. In addition, pages allow you to:

- Publish your wall and status updates to your fans' news streams
- Interact with your fans via status updates, comments and message updates
- Create customizable tabs (along with Discussions, Events, etc.)
- Direct non-fans to a landing page (tab) other than the page's wall during their first visit
- Pull in an RSS feed, or offer a landing page for YouTube videos
- Track your page's metrics

To get started, go to facebook.com/pages/create.php. When you have finished filling out all of the necessary information (name, category, profile picture, blurb box, and basic and detailed info), don't forget to publish the fan page and add other folks as administrators.

Some tips:

- Publish interesting content: This may be a no-brainer, but be aware of what your Facebook audience enjoys reading and chatting about. This doesn't mean you should compromise what news stories you promote, rather when sharing a news link, mention an engaging angle to promote conversation.
- Keep your profile active – but not spammy – so fans see your updates and visit your fan page often.
- Interact with your fans: If folks comment on your posts or wall, be sure to continue the dialogue – this helps to create a sense of community on your fan page. Encourage dialogue by asking questions, etc.
- Once you have more than 25 friends, you can claim your vanity URL. This is helpful, because it makes your Facebook page that much easier to promote and direct future fans to.
- Interact with your fans: If folks comment on your posts or wall, be sure to continue the dialogue – this helps to create a sense of community on your fan page.

- While your Facebook page may become a feed of information, try to make it a resource for Facebook users to come back to for more than just updates.

For more on Facebook's pages, check out the [Facebook Pages Product Guide](#) (March 2009).

Create an interactive timeline using Dipity

By HILARY FOSDAL

Interactive timelines are a great visual way to inform and engage users about your news topic.

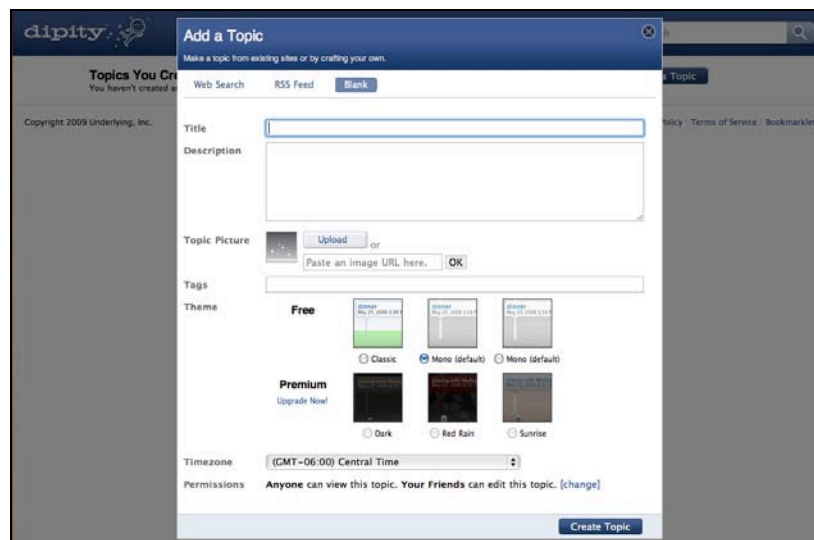
[Dipity](#) timelines can do more than display simple text. Adding photos, links, and pulling in RSS feeds are just a few of the fun features you can play around with.

Timelines created in Dipity can be displayed using a standard linear graph or in ‘Flipbook’ mode which is similar to a multimedia carousel or ‘List’ which displays the content in a cataloged format.

Whether you are detailing a series of events that lead up to a major news event, i.e., the spread of the swine flu, or providing a historical and chronological display of events, i.e, the history of the New York City Marathon, timelines are no longer confined to the boring textbooks of yesteryear.

HOW TO START CREATING YOUR OWN DIPITY INTERACTIVE TIMELINE

- Go to [Dipity](#) and create a free user account.
- Click “Add a Topic”
- A window will appear asking you to choose a method to craft your timeline: Web search, “RSS Feed” or “Blank.”
- To begin creating a standard timeline, choose “Blank.”



- The window will allow you to give the timeline a title and description, upload a timeline profile picture, add SEO tags, pick a theme and a time zone, and allow you to determine who you will allow to view your timeline. I would suggest picking a free theme and allowing anyone to view your timeline.
- To start creating events on your timeline click the blue button, “Add an Event.”
- A new window will appear that asks you to include:
 - Title
 - Date
 - Description
 - Upload a picture or paste an image URL
 - Add a link
 - Include the location of the event (Dipity will generate a map for the location of the event)
 - Add a video URL
- Once you click “Save,” the event will be added to your timeline which you can view in the standard Timeline format, as a Flipbook, List or on the Map.

You can always go back and edit or delete any of the fields by clicking the event located on your timeline.

You can click “Add a Source” to feed other online account data into your timeline, i.e., Flickr, Tumblr, FriendFeed and Yelp, to name just a few.

Once you have completed adding in all your “events” you can embed your Dipity timeline into your web site, blog, or Facebook. Dipity will generate a customized embed code when you click “embed widget.”

Embed a Dipity Topic

Configure the display of the topic below and copy and paste the embed code into your page.

Size

- Small
- Large
- Custom

600 w 400 h

Default View

- Timeline
- List
- Flipbook
- Map

Date

Center On

Automatic

Zoom

Automatic

Color

- Default
- List
- Custom

#7A99C1

Background

- Solid color
- Fade to white
- Fade to black

Embed Code <div class="dipity_embed" style="width:600px"><iframe width="600" height="

Timeline Flipbook List Map Share View in Dipity

Timeline view of New York City Marathon events:

- 25th New York City Marathon Nov 6, 1994 12:00 PM
- 26th New York City Marathon Nov 12, 1995 12:00 PM
- 27th New York City Marathon Nov 3, 1996 12:00 PM
- 28th New York City Marathon Nov 2, 1997 12:00 PM
- 29th New York City Marathon Nov 1, 1998 12:00 PM
- 24th New York City Marathon Nov 14, 1993 12:00 PM
- 31st New York City Marathon Nov 5, 2000 12:00 PM
- 32nd New York City Marathon Nov 4, 2001 12:00 PM

powered by dipity

Timeline axis: 1992 1993 1994 1995 1996 1997 1998 1999 2000 2001 2002

Dipity is also social media savvy and allows other Dipity users to comment on your timeline and has Twitter, Facebook and a host of other social networking apps to help you spread the word about your cool new timeline.

Still have more questions? Check out the Dipity [FAQ](#).

If you experiment with the RSS timeline feeds you'll discover that Dipity automatically pulls in the images embedded into your posts or articles. Personally, I think this is a great feature – one less field for me to fill in!

Examples of Dipity interactive timelines:

- [All things SPJ](#)
- [H1N1 Vaccine](#)
- [Apollo Timeline](#)

Tech tools to help you keep up with your FOIA requests

By JENNIFER PEEBLES

Reporters: Ever think of a record or document you'd like to get hold of and say to yourself, *Wait — haven't I already FOIA'ed that?*

You're not alone.

In response to a question that someone posed on the [FOI-L listserv](#), let's talk about some ways you can use technology to help you keep up with your records requests. We'll look at some pros and cons of each approach.

The simple text file: The most basic way to do it is with a text file on your computer — or, on a shared folder on a server on your network, if you're trying to share with co-workers or a team. Problem is, only one person can access that document at any one time — which could be a pain if you're trying to share with a large group or your entire newsroom.

And, if your newsroom's network is like any of the ones I've worked on, you can kiss goodbye the hope that anyone outside your building can ever access the document on the server — that cuts out your statehouse bureau, your guys at the cop shop, or any reporter who ever leaves the office with a laptop. Which is just about everyone these days.

Some better approaches:

Create a [Google Doc](#). Google will let you create and share documents for free if you have a Google/Gmail account — create a word processing document and then “invite” your co-workers to share it. No, you aren't sharing it with the whole world, just with the invitees. More than one person can be in the same Google Doc at a given time, and it's easily accessible to people outside the office.

(I should also note: You don't have to do your FOIA list as a word processing document. You can also store them as a spreadsheet file, with columns for date sent, agency FOIA'ed, description of document requested, status of request, contact person, etc.)

Create an intranet for your team/workgroup as a [Google Site](#). Google also lets you create free sites that you can share with a limited number of invitees. You can create new “pages” in your site, including one using the “list” template, that will allow you to create columns and pull-down menus for the headers I listed above. You can also upload attachments, such as .doc or .pdf files of the actual requests, in case you need to review how you worded something.

Create a wiki, either for yourself or your team. No, setting up a small wiki doesn't require any coding knowledge or server space — sites including [Mindtouch's Deki Wiki](#) and [PBWorks' PBwiki](#) will let you set up a wiki for a few users for free, which they host

themselves and which you administrate entirely through their Web interface. (At my shop, [Texas Watchdog](#) in Houston, we have a Deki Wiki for FOIAs, as well as having a Google Site intranet.) The idea is that everyone goes to the wiki and updates it every time they file a FOIA request, giving an accurate reflection of what has been requested and where it is in the pipeline.

You can also try notebook-type storing solutions such as [Evernote](#), which offers free accounts with a maximum monthly upload limit (pay users get more storage), [Springnote](#) or even [Google Notebook](#) — which still works, even though Google [says it's stopped active development on it](#).

Again, multiple people can access these repositories at once, and they're easily accessible to people outside your office, as long as they have an Internet connection. (The caveat: These are only helpful if people take the time to update them with info about their newly filed FOIAs. If that doesn't happen, well ... that's a human error, not the computer.)

So, how do you keep up with your FOIA requests?

Better video: Planning

By JEFF ACHEN

This is the second in a series of mini-tutorials on the basics of shooting video. If you know how to turn on a video camera and press “record,” this series is intended to help you take it to the next level for better news video results.

When it comes to video, there are three basic areas worth focusing on that will bring the quality of your final product up a notch to look and sound much more professional than ncle Bob’s 2008 Christmas footage: [Technique](#), **planning** and **publishing**. This post deals with the topic of **planning**.

Planning for your video includes the kind of thoughtful consideration you’d give to story angle and style. You must determine the reason you’re doing video, then execute it in a way that makes sense given your technology, time and storytelling commitments. Planning is also required in order to effectively do your job. The requirement to carry a video camera and still camera along with your usual notepad and pen can be intimidating, but proper planning makes it possible.

- News video is all about letting the viewer EXPERIENCE the elements of the story for themselves. In writing we do this through narrative writing, but video lets viewers see and hear the elements for themselves.
- When planning to shoot video for a multimedia story, ask yourself if the story you’re telling has some “action” element that would be exciting to show others. One way to think of it is by asking yourself, “What would I show my best friend if he/she were here on this story with me?” It could be how parts work together to make something important happen, it may be a process, it may be a demonstration, or it could be a person or animal doing something that’s more interesting on video than as a still photo.
- Consider asking if the interviewee has video. In cases where you’re interviewing a missionary to Africa or Peru, the volunteer may have taken video of their time there and can submit it for your use online. Police can often provide squad car camera video of traffic stops, etc.
- Consider video slideshows. Ever had a story with tons of great photos, but not enough room in the paper for more than two? Consider editing them together in sequence with a voice over that we could post online as a video.
- Capture important people saying important things. If someone is making a speech and you know you’ll be standing there for more than 20 minutes just taking notes, why not set up the video camera on a tripod to get some footage of the speech? You could post a memorable selection or quote from the speech online.
- Longer-form videos of political debates or controversial meetings can be of value to online viewers. Consider these types of videos as a resource for those readers who want more. Not everyone will watch a 45-minute video, but some will find it

extremely helpful to know that they can find such coverage on their local news site!

- Sports – even if you don't get video of the championship game (which is a good idea), we can go out to team practice for video of the featured athlete doing their thing. Our, if you've got a unique sport or unique aspect to a sport, video could enhance a sports feature story.
- Plan out your use of digital cameras, video cameras and interviewing to make sure you've got your bases covered. For instance, when covering a rodeo cowboy, perhaps you arrive and snap some photos while he's practicing. Then, when he takes a break, you take up your notepad and interview him, maybe even conduct the interview with the video camera rolling. Then, when he enters competition, you get some great b-roll video of him doing his thing. You've now got your interview notes, photos and video. Congratulations, you're a multimedia journalist!

If you're covering a breaking news story, my rule is always leave the video camera rolling. Get video of the fire, interview the firemen on camera, don't stop rolling. Then when you get back to the office, pull notes from the on-camera interview.

- Some cautions: Video of school plays or other copyrighted works is prohibited by law. We also have the same obligations as still photos when taping kids. Get permission and cover your butt.
- Just think about what you'd be willing to watch online. Don't subject your readers/viewers to something you wouldn't waste your time watching.