

CIVIC and CITIZEN Journalism

INTEREST GROUP NEWS

AEJMC

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Public & Public's journalism explored

By Jack Rosenberry
Immediate Past Chair, CCJIG

A key trend in the transformation of civic or public journalism is the greater involvement of citizen-generated content in the contemporary media landscape. But as this expression of the public's journalism takes hold, what of public journalism? What will it take to imagine a future for public journalism that incorporates elements of the new participatory media? The Civic and Citizen Journalism Interest Group explored these questions through a series of sessions at the annual AEJMC convention in Chicago in August 2008.

The connections came through clearly at the annual J-Lab Luncheon, where three representatives of traditional news organizations described how they are working to incorporate citizen contributions into their news mix.

Howard Owens, director of digital publishing for GateHouse Media, which owns more than 100 newspapers mostly in smaller markets across the United States, said online coverage only starts with the basic information-gathering and online presentation. Once the story is posted, it can generate conversation through story comments; journalists should follow these comments and even participate in the conversation as a way of following through on their work.

Dan Barkin, senior editor/online for the *News and Observer* in Raleigh, N.C., described several innovative projects his organization has adopted, especially ones involving "crowdsourcing," or getting ideas and information from a wide variety of audience members to help direct and shape the final story. One, for example, asked readers to write in about stretches of road in need of repair. This allowed the audience to act as the eyes of the

newspaper in the community and to discover the poor pavement faster and more efficiently than the paper's journalists could on their own.

Kate Marymont, vice president/information center content for Gannett Corp., the nation's largest newspaper company, described several projects at Gannett papers in which online coverage was used to improve the watchdog role that journalists play. "We need to do public service journalism digitally," she said. In response to an audience member's question about how digital coverage could provide business benefits, she said that it offers opportunities to improve the quality of journalism itself, which in the long run will improve the business prospects for companies that practice it.

The J-Lab luncheon was one of

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Journalism comes full circle with civic/citizen movement

By Nikhil Moro
CCJIG Chair

Boston is where it all started 318 years ago.

It was in Boston, arguably, where America's earliest journalism was practiced. In that city lived the earliest printer-editors, two Benjamins and two Franklins: Benjamin Harris' *Publick Occurrences Both Foreign and Domestick* (1690) was quirky, witty and chatty, a veritable



coffeehouse in newsprint. James and Ben Franklin's *New-England Courant* (1721-23) carried wacky stories sometimes under Ben's pseudonymous byline "Silence Dogood."

The early editors perpetually had a finger on the readers' pulse. They were citizens first, community activists second, and editors if at all. They were not J-school trained in any nuance of

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Public

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two bookends to the process of examining the nexus of public journalism's traditional roles and values with the emerging practices of participatory journalism. The other was a half-day pre-conference activity sponsored off-site at Columbia College of Chicago on Tuesday, featuring three sessions on the themes of the past, present and future of public journalism.

The historical overview included two of the original scholars who helped define the practice of public journalism nearly two decades ago, Ed Lambeth of the University of Missouri and Jay Rosen of New York University. They were joined on the panel by Mark Deuze of Indiana University and Burton St. John III of Old Dominion.

Lambeth described the importance of education and the role journalists should play in creating a better-educated public, reflecting some of the ideas of early 20th century education reformer John Dewey. Dewey's notion was that newspapers should "interest the public in the public interest" by becoming vehicles for public education and discussion of civic issues.

Rosen noted that since public journalism began about 20 years ago, the trend of developments has been on evolving practices that do not necessarily involve mainstream media. This, he added, should be seen in the context of other "sweeps" of media history going back about 300 years to the development of newspapers shortly after the invention of moveable type. The general trend throughout this time has been toward a greater democratization of the media, with more outlets and more sources.

Deuze described a framework of convergence culture, or potential strategies for a future citizen journalism where professional reporters and engaged citizens co-create a public sphere within their communities of reference.

St. John, for his part, reported on a case-study of a citizen-generated section of the *Virginian Pilot* newspaper.

He highlighted how both the newspaper and citizens used this page to write items that express pro-social values like curiosity, kindness and citizenship. His evaluation of the case study focused not only on how this kind of citizen-created material provides insights about the potential power of citizen journalists, but also how it provides provocative questions about the facilitative role of the journalists.

The middle session, devoted to present practices, featured representatives of three Chicago-area online hyper-local and citizen journalism Web sites: Adrian Holovaty, everyblock.com; Steve Rhoades, the Beechwood Reporter; and Suzanne McBride, ChicagoTalks. Each described the work of his or her site in augmenting the traditional media mix with audience-contributed content.

The future session featured Rosen again, joined by Len Witt of Kennesaw State, Mindy McAdam of the University of Florida and, in a telephone conference call, Jeff Jarvis of City University of New York. All are active bloggers and described how their blogging has created new insights for themselves and their audiences, helping to define the parameters of a new form of coverage.

Two trends in the field seemed to come up repeatedly in the sessions:

Reconceptualizing news as a conversation is not a fad; it is here to stay. Citizen journalists without ties to traditional media organizations are making ever-growing contributions to the media mix. This was especially evident from the presentations of Holovaty, Rhoades and McBride, as well as Rosen and Witt in their discussions of blogging.

However, facilitation, direction and moderation can help more productive conversation to emerge, which offers a potential role for traditional media to play – including provision of a locus for community information exchange to take place. The J-Lab speakers from the major media organizations exemplified this, as did Lambeth in his call for a media focus on public education and St. John in his report on citizen media reporting in the print edition of a Virginia newspaper.

CALL FOR PANEL PROPOSALS

By
Mary Beth Callie
CCJIG Co-Vice Chair/
Co-Programming Chair

The Civic & Citizen Journalism Interest Group (CCJIG) invites proposals for engaging panels for the 2009 AEJMC convention in Boston.

Please email your panel proposal to Co-Vice Chair Mary Beth Callie, mcallie@regis.edu, as a word attachment by October 15.

Past panels have focused on blogging, civic mapping, community conversations, newsroom projects, legal/ethical issues in civic or citizen journalism, using Internet polling, focus groups and other methods in civic reporting, practicing civic and citizen journalism in a multicultural environment, using new technologies, the history/philosophy of civic journalism, and teaching civic and citizen journalism.

The 2008 convention in Chicago continued to hone the direction of the field. Panel proposals for 2009 may address, but are not limited to, the following broad themes:

- Citizen/civic journalism in the 2008 presidential campaigns
- Media convergence as a catalyst of citizen journalism
- Emerging models in practice, sustenance, and teaching of civic/citizen journalism

■ Collective intelligence (crowdsourcing) vs. information gateways (traditional gatekeeper role of press).

In general, address topics that are relevant to current discussions in journalism, politics, technology, democracy, or philosophy. Panels addressing issues of cultural and racial diversity are encouraged.

Your panel proposal should mention the following components in order: Type (i.e., PF&R, Teaching, Research), a tentative title, a possible moderator, the possible panelists (limit to three so we can work on linking with other interest groups and divisions), a brief description of the panel, and possible co-sponsors (divisions or interest groups). Please follow this format as closely as possible.

Selected proposals are compiled into a single document, with proposals from other divisions and interest groups, in order to be considered for co-sponsorship and scheduling. Many will later be revised or expanded as part of the joint planning process.

A sample proposal is available at http://www.has.vcu.edu/civic-journalism/Sample_Panel_Proposal.doc

We look forward to your proposals!

Fee hike may solve projector deficiency

By **Jack Rosenberry**
Immediate Past Chair, CCJIG

Despite becoming ubiquitous in the classroom in recent years, computer projectors have been scarce at AEJMC conventions — something that's frustrating to educators on convention panels who like using presentation programs such as PowerPoint to support their talks.

A proposal under consideration by AEJMC leadership would provide projection equipment for many research and panel presentations at the convention, but at a cost. The association estimates the registration fee would have to be raised by about \$20 to offset the cost of having the convention hotel supply the additional video equipment. Because of the magnitude of this proposed price hike, association officials asked all units within the Council of Divisions to poll members for a "sense

of the division" report on whether to impose this additional fee or not.

The Civic and Citizen Journalism Interest Group conducted a members' poll using Survey Monkey, and based on 26 responses (about a quarter of the unit membership), the fee increase was supported by a 73 percent – 27 percent margin. That outcome and some of the additional comments from members have been forwarded to Council of Divisions Chair Kim Bissell of the University of Alabama.

Comments were added by 10 of the survey respondents. Some of the concerns, ideas and suggestions in the comments were:

■ That it was disappointing Internet access would not be offered as well. One respondent called the additional expense "a hard call" for projectors alone and no Internet. Another who voted against the proposal

would have supported it if it had included Internet access.

■ That the association ought to invest in the projectors and bring them to the convention. However, the hotels the association tends to use frown on, or forbid groups from supplying their own equipment. A couple of respondents who knew about this limitation suggested that AEJMC refuse to do business with hotels that follow this policy and/or use the fact that the association brings a huge amount of business to these places as leverage to change the policy.

■ That the proposal makes sense only if technical support will be provided as well because it's inevitable that projectors will malfunction or presenters will have other difficulties with them. "Without tech help the projectors won't be much good," this commenter said.

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Movement

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reporting, pagination or ethics (why, Ben Franklin published his own letters as if sent by readers). Their work could not be measured by Siebert's theories or Hutchins' norms.

Yet their writings showed a powerful desire to connect with readers, to decide what news is, to influence public opinion.

That desire, the journalist's craving, is what produces journalism. The rest is literature.

Through all of American journalism's history – the Revolution, penny press, Civil War, Pulitzer and Hearst, the era of electronic media – successful editors have had a common denominator: They've known the pulse of the readers.

Is there any surprise that there's a reflection of democracy in journalism?

The newspaper industry's recent travails have raised important questions.

Does institutionalization shield the journalist from the reader's pulse? Can good journalism guarantee profits? Is pulse-of-the-reader journalism more important than sound economics? Or is one a subset of the other? If news and advertising are the two sides of a piece of toast, which side is buttered? Oh well, that last one was a joke.

Heading to AEJMC, Boston

From the small-town *Lansing State Journal* to the venerated *New York Times*, every urban newspaper today recognizes a holy grail in finding a cure for the throbbing ache of falling circulations. Papers are embracing citizen/civic journalism: From the *Times* to CNN, America's loftiest media organizations are welcoming the lowliest blogger for his or her proactive journalism, a phenomenon that J.D. Lasica has classified in some detail.

They are trying to touch the communities. David Perry's call to use journalism to enhance social capital in communities, and Buzz Merritt's cry for public journalism are too famous to elaborate here. Leonard Witt's proposal of "representative" journalism, using not organizational but communal resources, cuts costs to the media. Jeff Jarvis passionately declares, "Give the people control of media, they will use it. The corollary: Don't give the people control of media, and you will lose."

Clearly, scholars and journalists alike are feeling a sharp excitement in the "former audience" (to use Dan Gillmor's pregnant term) contributing its collective intelligence to distill news to keep it accurate, cheap and exciting. In other words a YouTubization of our legacy media is the sexy new way to know the readers' pulse.

Has journalism come full circle from the time of the Benjamins and Franklins or what!