



The SPJ Digital Media Handbook

Part I

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

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Our contributors

Jeff Achen is the multimedia producer and online editor for Thisweeklive.com, a community newspaper Web site in Minnesota. He is also a freelance photographer/videographer and blogger at www.mnvideopro.wordpress.com. You can follow him on [Twitter.com/jeffachen](https://twitter.com/jeffachen) or email jeffachen@mac.com.

Rebecca Aguilar is an Emmy Award-winning freelance multimedia reporter in Dallas. She produces videos and digital slideshows along with her reports. She is currently working on a degree in multimedia development. She can be reached at aguilar.thereporter@yahoo.com.

Jessica Durkin is a member of the SPJ Digital Media Committee, the Region 3 director for the National Association of Hispanic Journalists, and is a big advocate of entrepreneurial journalism. Jessica is based in Scranton, Pa. She started <http://inothernews.us> to track online community news start-ups. She's [@jessdrkn](https://twitter.com/@jessdrkn).

Hilary Fosdal is the interactive content manager for Barrington Broadcasting Group. You can follow her on Twitter at [@hilaryfosdal](https://twitter.com/@hilaryfosdal) and read more of her work on her blog, <http://hilaryfosdal.com>.

Amanda Maurer is the online and social media producer at the *Chicago Tribune* and blogs at acmaurer.com. You can also follow her on Twitter at [acmaurer](https://twitter.com/acmaurer).

Jennifer Peebles is deputy editor of [Texas Watchdog](http://TexasWatchdog.org), a nonprofit, online newspaper in Houston. Follow her on Twitter [@jpeebles](https://twitter.com/@jpeebles) or [@texaswatchdog](https://twitter.com/@texaswatchdog), or e-mail her at Jennifer@texaswatchdog.org.

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

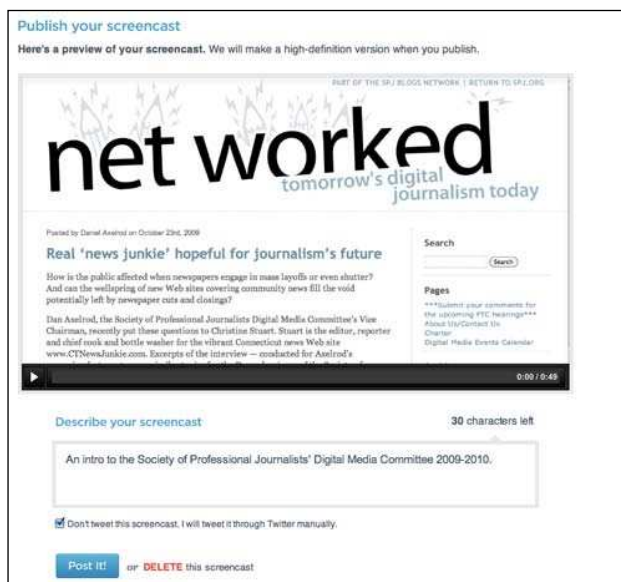
Did you ever want to take a screen-grab of a Web site or an image on your computer, add a voice-over and share it with a friend?

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.

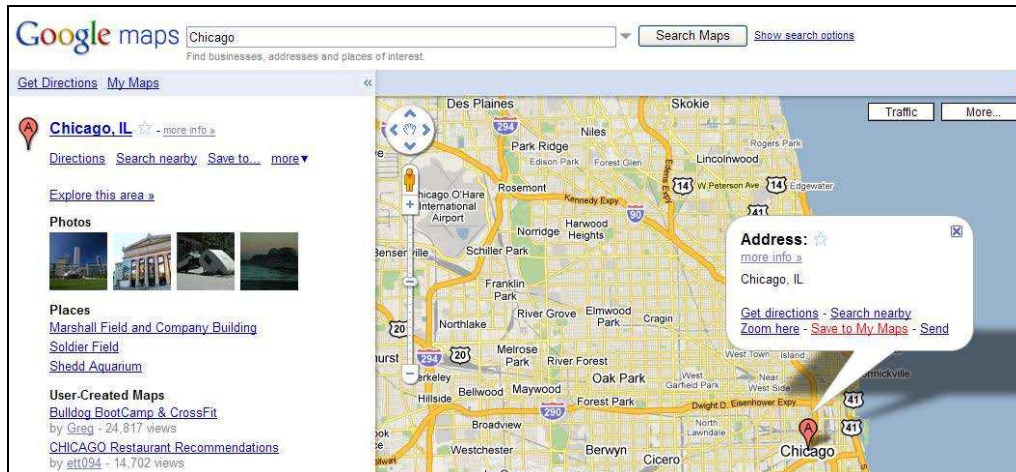
Decide whether you want your map to be displayed publicly or only with people you choose to share the map's URL.

Click "Save."

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

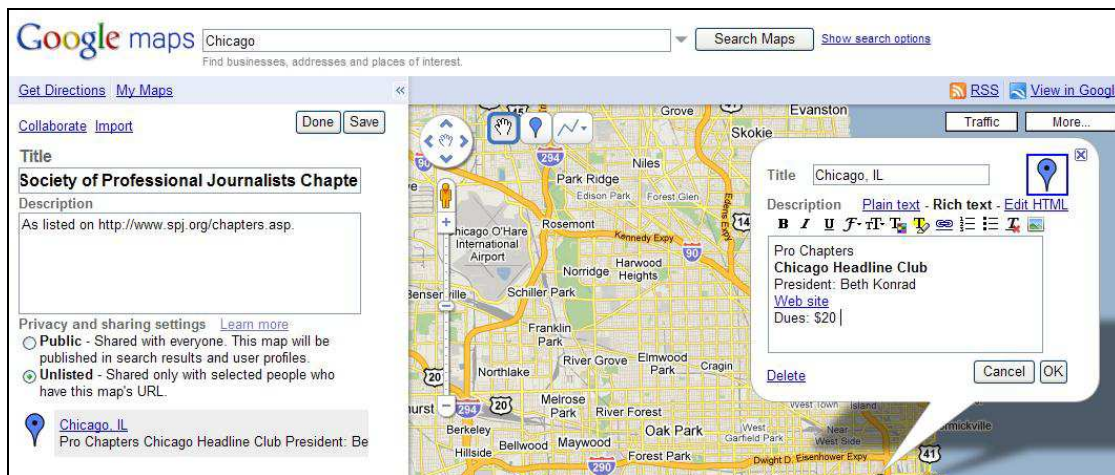
For example, I will type in "Chicago" and click "Search Map," and a red balloon appears on the city of Chicago along with a bubble with more information on Google maps.

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.”

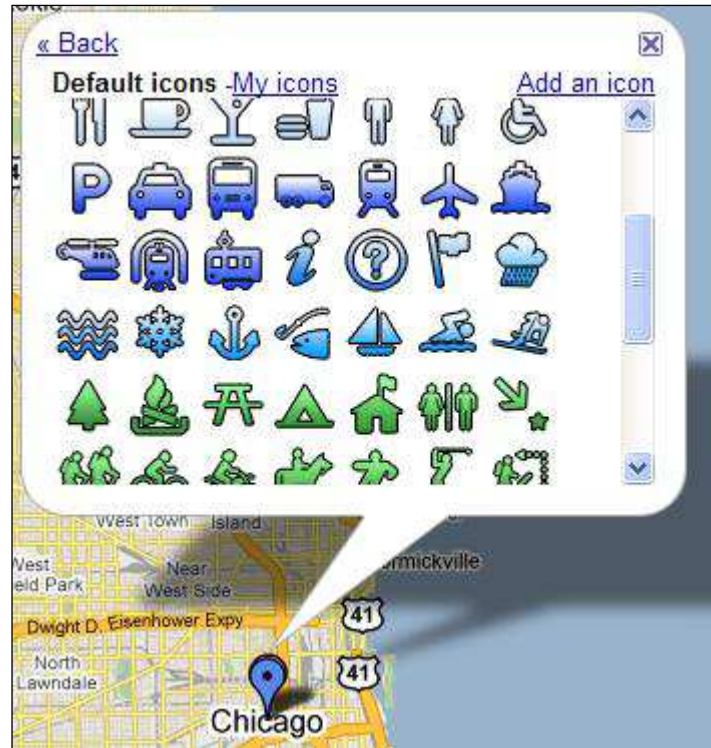
Advanced step:

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.

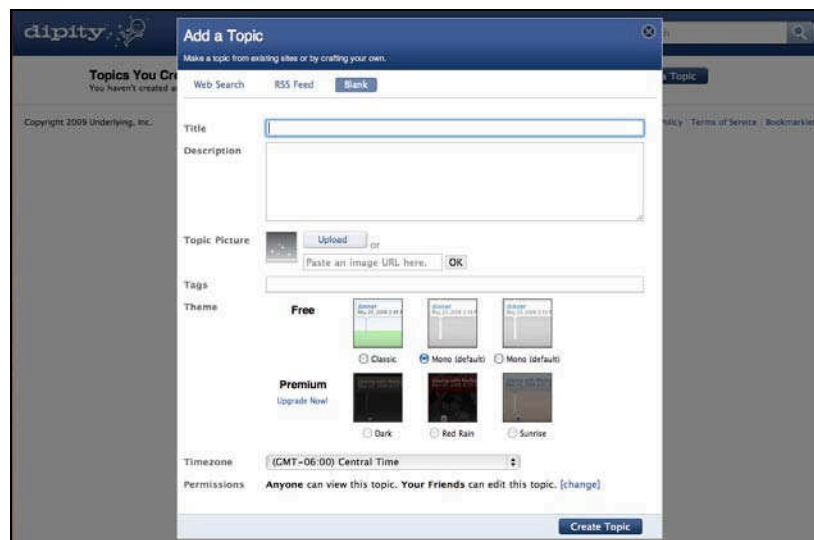
[Dipity](#) timelines can do more than display simple text. Adding photos, links, and pulling in RSS feeds are just a few of the fun features you can play around with.

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

 Zoom

Color
 Default
 Custom

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 of New York City Marathons:

- 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

powered by dipity

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.



The SPJ
Digital Media Handbook
Part II

By

*The members of the Society
of Professional Journalists* □
Digital Media Committee

Published September 2010

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About the authors

Jeff Achen is an interactive media strategist for the Minnesota Community Foundation, The Saint Paul Foundation and GiveMN.org, nonprofit organizations in Minnesota. He is also a consultant, freelance photographer/videographer, and blogger at www.mnvideopro.wordpress.com. You can follow him on [Twitter.com/jeffachen](https://twitter.com/jeffachen) or email jeffachen@mac.com.

Rebecca Aguilar is a freelance multimedia reporter based in Dallas. She has 29 years of experience and has won numerous awards for her work, including several Emmy awards. She is also on the board of the National Association of Hispanic Journalists. Rebecca conducts reporting workshops around the country (Finding Sources and Stories, Networking, Live Shots, Getting the Best Interview, Writing to Video, and The Basics Of Multimedia.) She can be contacted at aguilar.thereporter@yahoo.com.

Jessica Durkin is a former old-school print reporter going new-school. Jessica is the founder and editor of InOtherNews.us, a directory of online, independent news sites around the country. She is based in Scranton, Pa., and is a regional director for the National Association of Hispanic Journalists.

Hilary Fosdal is the associate new media editor at the Law Bulletin Publishing Co. in Chicago. You can visit her site hilaryfosdal.com and follow her on Twitter [@hilaryfosdal](https://twitter.com/hilaryfosdal).

Amanda Maurer is a digital news editor at the *Chicago Tribune* who specializes in social media. She blogs at acmaurer.com; you can also follow her on Twitter at [@acmaurer](https://twitter.com/acmaurer).

Jennifer Peebles is deputy editor of [Texas Watchdog](http://TexasWatchdog.com), a nonprofit news Web site in Houston that is a member of the [Investigative News Network](http://InvestigativeNewsNetwork.com). Follow her on Twitter at [@jpeebles](https://twitter.com/jpeebles). She also often Tweets as [@TexasWatchdog](https://twitter.com/TexasWatchdog).

Emily Sweeney is a staff reporter at *The Boston Globe*. You can follow her on Twitter ([@emilysweeney](https://twitter.com/emilysweeney)) and find her on [LinkedIn](https://www.linkedin.com/in/emilysweeney), among other places.

An easy way to get your blog hosted and posted

By JESSICA DURKIN

You don't have to be a coding guru or Silicon Valley veteran to start blogging with some bells and whistles.

I started from scratch last year, and my goals were simply to have a blog or site where I could post text, embed links, upload multimedia, and while I was at it, add some of those social media and bookmarking buttons to easily share my pages.

I don't know much about metatagging or SEO, have no idea what FTP sites have to do with anything, and CSS is beyond me.

This blog post is about my recent experience with WordPress.com and [GoDaddy](http://GoDaddy.com) — no special treatment for those companies, they are not paying me or anything, it's just what I use and know. Do a Google search for "domain registration" and "web hosting" for other companies to work with. Typepad and Moveable Type are other blogging companies similar to WordPress. The key is finding a one-stop-shopping place to connect your domain and site to a host.

First, I secured several domain names with GoDaddy, and then I opened a WordPress.com account, where I keep my online news directory InOtherNews.us. Through WordPress.com, I easily connected that domain to the blog. The instructions are clear, and it can be done in a few clicks. WordPress.com hosts the blog.

After several months of getting familiar with WordPress.com functioning, I started noticing limitations, namely, customization. I wanted to "trick-out" my blog with [widgets](#) and plug-ins and play around with themes. I also wanted to add social media buttons to posts and sidebars. WordPress.com blogs allow for those, but the selection is relatively small.

So I went over to WordPress.org — note: it's DOT ORG — which is the natural next step to custom blogging. With WP dot org, you have to find a host elsewhere, and once you do, there are thousands of site design themes to choose from and a plug-in for just about any function you would want to add to your blog.

And this brings me back to GoDaddy, where my domains are registered. GoDaddy offers site [hosting packages](#), I chose the \$6.99 a month Deluxe plan. The hosting can be used for myriad blogging and Website frameworks such as Joomla and Drupal.

Once the hosting service transaction is complete, follow the quick GoDaddy process for downloading a WordPress blog and connecting a domain to it. I did this and was soon playing around with sophisticated themes and browsing hundreds of plug-ins for my new site (and I mean new — it's a work in progress), NewsRedux.us.

The one-stop shopping at GoDaddy removed a lot of anxiety and frustration with getting my new self-hosted blog on the internet.

And if you get stuck, there's always the 24/7 tech support phone number.

Addendum: The company Page.ly offers one-stop shopping for self-hosting blog set-up. Leave the technical guesswork to them. Service is about \$15 a month. They'll get you blogging and will install all the SEO, plug-in, meta-tagging, social bookmarking gadgets for you.

Addendum: I came across this [article](#), which has the steps for moving from WordPress.com to WordPress.org.

Are you ready to use CoveritLive?

By HILARY FOSDAL

[CoveritLive](#) is a free live-blogging tool used by thousands of journalists, bloggers and [news organizations around the world](#).

Whether you are breaking news, covering a sports game or running a Q & A, CoveritLive brings your online reporting to your audience in real-time.

Top 3 reasons to use CoveritLive

1. It's free. Yes, FREE! \$0
2. Creating an account takes two minutes. Actually, depending on your typing skills, it may take you a tad bit longer, or shorter, it really depends ☐
3. Software to download = zero. Zero for you to host CiL or for your audience to participate!

Where do I sign up for a CoveritLive account?

Go to the [CoveritLive](#) registration page.

Why is CoveritLive a great tool for journalists?

CiL allows you to report breaking news in real-time, hold an interactive Q & A with experts or broadcast the play-by-play at a sporting events.

What type of software do I need to install CiL?

None. You don't need to install any software.

Can I personalize my CiL account?

Yes. CiL allows you to custom brand your template. Whether it is as simple as having your name or company logo out front, customizing your CoveritLive template is an important step in building a connection with your audience.

Here is what the default template looks like:



CiL has a number of features to enhance your live-blogging event including:

- Streaming live video
- Incorporating Twitter posts
- Polls
- News Flash and scoreboards

Want to experience a CiL event live now? [Check out this list](#) of continuously updated live CiL events.

Oh, and it's free (yes, I know I mentioned it before).

And yes, there is an [iPhone app](#). It's free too.

Stop web content thieves from taking your work

By REBECCA AGUILAR

Plagiarism is an ugly word. Have you ever wondered if you are a victim of web content theft?

A few months ago, I happened to get on a new Internet news site where contributors get paid by the click on their story. I also happened to discover that a story posted by a babysitter-turned-news contributor actually was written by a reporter friend of mine who works for a major newspaper.

The woman who copied and pasted parts of my friend's story did not credit him. Sure, she only took parts of his story, but it was taken word for word. Why the news site managers didn't look into this; that's another story. Of course, I told my reporter friend, and he took care of the rest.



At a social networking conference, I learned about a site called [Copyscape](#). It's a **free** plagiarism checker. Simple to use and, right now, appears to be the only web tool out there targeting plagiarism.

How does it work? Just put the URL in the search box that you want to check for plagiarism and submit.

Copyscape does the search for **free**. It even offers a banner that you can put on your own website that warns people that you use Copyscape for checking.

If you want more bells and whistles, you have to pay for it, but that includes a service that is constantly looking for your work for plagiarism and alerts you.

Copyscape has had several favorable reviews by major publications and Internet news sites. Read more at <http://www.copyscape.com/press.php>.

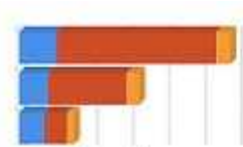
Free chart creation with Chartle.net

By HILARY FOSDAL

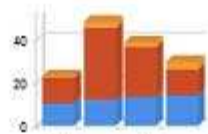
Creating and publishing interactive charts no longer requires expensive software.

Forget about building simple line graphs. Using Chartle.net you can create any number of visual charts to display your data online.

Here are a few examples of the types of charts you can make using Chartle.net:



Bar Chart



Column Chart



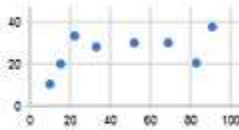
Bar Chart



Pie Chart



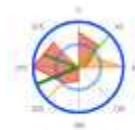
Pie Chart



Scatter Plot



Venn Diagram



Radar Chart



Annotated Timeline



Motion Chart



Intensity Map



Intensity US Map



Map



US Map



Gauge



O-Meter

Using Chartle.net does not require registration and is free.

Every chart you build can be published, shared and embedded on your website or blog.

Data for your chart can be entered manually or inputted using an Excel spreadsheet via the Importfeature.

You can also adjust the size of the chart you create to fit your site.

Before you publish your Chartle you'll be asked to give it a

- Title
- Author
- Description

[Click here to view an example of this interactive Chartle.net chart.](#)

Need to make a modification to your chart? You can create a new chart using the data stored in a currently published chart.

Creating shareable wireframes with Gliffy

By HILARY FOSDAL

There will come a time, if it hasn't already, when you will be asked to help design a web page or even be tasked with designing an entire web site.

The first step in the design process is creating a wireframe.

Wireframes show the placement of basic elements on a web page i.e., logo, navigation, content, etc.

[Click here to see a wireframe sample](#)

A piece of paper might suffice for sketching out your instantaneous and creative bursts, but ultimately your design should be implemented within a shareable wireframe software.

A simple Microsoft application such as [Paint](#) or a freeware program like [GIMP](#) can transform your cocktail napkin drawings into a digital wireframe. However, making edits, sharing your work and collaborating in these applications is difficult. To send a wireframe to a colleague or client using one of these applications requires that you send attachments in a .jpg or other file format. Additionally, making changes to the wireframe can be complex and confusing, even resulting in duplicated or lost files as each party has to save and edit and catalog the most updated version of the project before sending it onward for further revisions or approval.

Today there is a better alternative [Gliffy](#).

And yes, it's free.

Gliffy is an online software application that provides the user with a gridded canvas to assist in lining up objects and a library of shapes and generic images to begin drafting your basic web page elements.

The program is simple to learn just click and drag objects onto the canvas.

Because web design work is a collaborative effort, Gliffy allows you to invite contributors to edit your wireframes and creates a unique, public URL for each of your wireframe documents.

Tips for creating wireframes:

- Don't fret over choosing the right colors or text font for the web page during the beginning stages
- Wireframes should grow increasingly detailed as you receive feedback from your client or colleagues

An introduction to social news sites

By AMANDA MAURER

Using social news sites is a great way to discover what's hot on the Web, find stories and story ideas related to your beat, and share content with other audiences.

Social news sites are different from social networks because they are communities where users can submit links and share them with other users. On most sites, users have the power to vote on the submitted content, which can impact its visibility to the rest of the community. If enough users vote up a link (because they think that content is newsworthy or simply interesting), it could be shared for all to see on the front page of the site, where the link could experience a burst of traffic.

In addition, some of these sites are influenced by algorithms and monitored by editors. The algorithms determine which stories become popular based on a number of undisclosed factors. The editors watch over the submitted content and have the ability to impact the success of a link either by promoting it or removing it if it's inappropriate or against the site's Terms of Use.

Social news sites come in all shapes and sizes, just like social networks. Some are general and others have more niche-focused audiences. Some of these lists are a bit old, but they give you an idea of how many sites are out there:

- Dosh Dosh: [50 Social News Websites](#)
- Squareoak: [83 Social News Sites](#) [Categorized by Niche](#)
- Social Media Trader: [115 Social News and Bookmark Sites Ranked and Rated](#)

To get started on a social network:

- Determine which one is right for you. Before joining a community, do some research to find out if it has an active community, if it fits your interests, how much participation is required, etc.
- Observe how the community operates. Participation on most sites involves voting on others' submissions, leaving comments and more. These actions usually increase your influence in the community and are often reciprocated. Other users will want to become your friend if they see you're active and good to your friends.
- Seek out influential users (those who have stories promoted to the front often, etc.) and find out what makes them influential. What you can do to achieve similar success?
- Be patient. Success won't come overnight, so don't join in hopes that your first link will become wildly popular. It can take weeks to create a profile that has the potential to make your link go viral.

Seven social media tools for journalists

By EMILY SWEENEY

Sree Sreenivasan is dean of student affairs at Columbia Graduate School of Journalism, a social networking whiz, and an all-around cool guy. He recently stopped by *The Boston Globe* to talk to reporters and editors about the joys of Twitter and how to tweet efficiently and effectively. He showed us some handy Twitter-related tools that journos can use to locate sources, find story ideas, and get more people to check out your work. Here's a quick sampling:

- 1.) [HootSuite](#): Web-based service allows you to track tweets, manage several Twitter accounts at the same time, and schedule when your tweets will be posted (so you can tweet into the future)
- 2.) [Twiangulate](#): Find out who the people you follow are following. Great way to discover new sources.
- 3.) [FriendorFollow](#): Find out who's following you back (and who isn't)
- 4.) [TwitCam](#): Live video streaming. Looking forward to trying this — sounds really cool.
- 5.) [Twitpic](#): I use this service. Easy way to share photos and images.
- 6.) [Search.twitter.com](#): Find trending topics.
- 7.) [Monitter.com](#): Search tweets by location. Another site worth checking out is [Trendsmap](#), which lets you view trending topics in any location, in real-time.

For more tools and tips, check out Sree's [Social Media Tipsheet](#) and his [Twitter Guide for Newbies & Skeptics](#).

☐ **and YO ☐ a word to the wise!** As you probably know, there are zillions of Twitter apps, tools and services floating around out there, and new ones are being created every day. Many of them require that you type in your Twitter username and password to use them. **So be careful!** Don't hand over your Twitter housekeys without doing some due diligence first. Before you type in your Twitter account information and password into any website, make sure it has a solid rep and has been reviewed by some reliable media experts (like Sree, or the good folks here on SPJ's Digital Media Committee.)

Top 10 social media best practices

By AMANDA MAURER

No matter if you're new to social media or if you've been active for years, it's always a great time to evaluate your efforts. Below are the 10 most popular suggestions I share when it comes to participating on social sites.

1. Start with a plan: Before you sign up for a social site, come up with a game plan. You should be able to answer these questions: What do you want to accomplish? How much time do you have to spend on maintaining a social profile? Who do you want to reach and where can you find them online? Those questions will help determine which tools and sites you should use. If you don't know, start doing some research.

2. Fill out your profile: Adding a photo or filling out your bio may seem basic, but it shows the community that you care. Photos help users remember you, and bios allow them to find you easily.

3. Be transparent: Interacting with folks on social sites can be a very personal experience. Users want to trust you so make sure your profiles honestly portray who you are, what company you work for and why you're on that site.

4. Be genuine: Stay true to who you are. People will want to connect with you if they feel you offer an authentic relationship. Similarly, while setting up RSS feeds to accounts or connecting Twitter feeds to Facebook may save you time, they don't offer the authentic relationships many users are looking for or will want to interact with.

5. Stay active and commit time to building your profile: Creating a successful profile online can take weeks, if not months. During that time you'll learn it's important to maintain and update your profile every day. Posting often will remind your friends that you're active on the site, and they'll be more likely to interact with you. Note: Be careful not to post too often. You don't want to clog up your friends' feeds with all of your posts.

6. Listen and interact: For the most part, being active on social sites requires two things: participating and listening. Remember that your profile isn't a one-sided conversation. If you want folks to comment and interact with you, you'll need to spend the time interacting with them. Be engaging by posting interesting content, asking questions and being polite (saying "thank you," etc.).

7. Follow people back: It's a general courtesy to follow those who friend you. Mutual friendships offer several benefits like the ability to send private messages to one another. They also show the community that you're interested in others, rather than keeping to yourself.

8. Edit your posts: Become familiar with the editing options each site offers. On Twitter you can determine how your Tweet reads; but did you also know that you can edit the headline, description and photo on a link posted in Facebook or a link submitted to Digg? This means you can take out the "website.com" text that often appears after the headline and customize the description to something that is appealing to your audience.

9. Track metrics: If you're not sure how much of an impact you're making, check your metrics. This could be as easy as setting up an account with bit.ly, a link shortening service. It tracks how many clicks each link receives and offers other analytics. It'll help you figure out if your effort is yielding the response you want.

10. Mistakes happen: We all make mistakes online, but it's important to learn from them and move on. If a message does go out that's incorrect or inappropriate, take a moment to correct that mistake or apologize. The community will appreciate it.

Twitter: An easy way to take part in or host a live chat

By JENNIFER PEEBLES

Talk is cheap, the old saying goes. And its cousin, chat, is cheap, free and easy on [Twitter](#).

Whatever you want to talk about, it's easy to do a live public chat with people around the world through Twitter. Gone are the days when you had to persuade people to be in front of their computer monitors at the same time and do chat through a Web page. Now, you can chat with people wherever they're able to reach their Twitter accounts.

All you have to do to follow a Twitter chat is search under the chat's hashtag — it's a keyword that begins with a pound sign (and for more on hashtags, check out [this post I did several months ago about using hashtags](#)). You can search for the hashtag by going to Twitter's search page (<http://search.twitter.com>), but many of the most popular Twitter clients, such as [TweetDeck](#) and [Twhirl](#), have built-in search functions now, too. Or, keep up with the chat conversation via your [RSS reader](#) like [Google Reader](#) or Bloglines — you can get the RSS feed for the chat by searching for the term in Twitter's search page.

And to join in the chat, all you have to do is Tweet and include the chat hashtag. It's that simple.

(There are also a couple of sites, such as [tweetchat.com](#), that are supposed to make it even easier to take part in Twitter chats. I've never used them, but I'm eager to try them out.)

I've been taking part recently in a couple of cool Twitter chats. One is [#wjchat](#). It's for Web journalists — and that's probably everyone reading this blog post. It's at 2 p.m. Eastern/5 p.m. Pacific on Wednesdays. To keep up with the topics and chat guests, follow the chat Twitter account, [@wjchat](#), and check out their Web site, <http://wjchat.webjournalist.org/>.

The last #wjchat I attended was on the topic of new business models for journalism. The moderator was [@digidave](#) of [Spot.Us](#), a site that is breaking new ground in crowdfunding journalism.

Another interesting Twitter chat I've been following is [#FOIAchat](#). It's about freedom of information issues, and it's held on Fridays at 2 p.m. Eastern/1 p.m. Central. You can follow [@FOIAchat](#) for updates.

I actually got to be the guest for #FOIAchat a few weeks ago, and I got to tell the chatters about my challenges trying to get digital audio files from an appeals court clerk's office that didn't want to give them up. (I wound up taking part in the chat while I was actually looking at public records in the offices of an electric power utility in San Antonio using my cellphone as a modem for my laptop. Flipping through a couple thousand pages of records while simultaneously trying to Twitter-chat is a handful, let me tell you.)

There are lots of other chats, some journalism-related and some not. Some smart person has started a Twitter chat [Google spreadsheet that I found online](#) listing Twitter chats on a wide variety of subjects. A quick run-through shows there's #blogchat, #journchat and numerous others you might have an interest in. Or, start your own — come up with a hashtag for the chat, figure out when you want to do it, and pass the word to your friends to take part.

Ten ways to pimp your brand

By EMILY SWEENEY

I was tempted to call this blog post "Ten ways to pimp yourself online," but I worried that such a vague label might attract an audience with entrepreneurial aspirations of a different sort, perhaps of the (gasp!) street corner variety.

Because this blog is geared toward the journalistically inclined, I suppose "building your brand" is a more appropriate description. In any case, here are 10 tips on how to increase your visibility so you can sell your skills, talents and services ...



1. **Defend your turf.** Sign up for social networking sites and claim your name before anyone else does. Try to be consistent with your usernames. I try to use my real name whenever possible — I set my Twitter handle as [@emilysweeney](#). On Facebook, however, I wasn't so lucky — another Emily Sweeney beat me to the punch, so I couldn't use that as my Facebook URL. Don't let that happen to you!
2. **Master your domain.** Buy a domain name that you can use as a "home base" — a place where you can post clips and showcase your work. I registered my name — [www.emilysweeney.com](#) — and I use that URL for my online portfolio.
3. **Join a gang.** Follow the advice of media maven Dan Schawbel, author of the Personal Branding Blog, and form "a Twitter mastermind group." Dan says: "As you may suspect, certain groups of people on Twitter constantly promote and retweet each other. Some of them are in what are called "mastermind groups" — groups of individuals who are committed to helping each other and sharing knowledge amongst themselves. They are communities of supportive colleagues who seek to mutually help each other become more successful." Read more about that, and Dan's other helpful tips, in his excellent column, "How To Build Your Personal Brand on Twitter."
4. **Leave your mark.** While it might be tempting to spray paint your Twitter handle on a subway train, please don't. There's no need to vandalize. There are plenty of other ways to promote yourself. For starters, you can add your website URL and Twitter handle to your email signature, your blog comments, and the taglines of articles you write. You should also put this 411 on your business cards, and all of your social networking profiles. Make bumper stickers emblazoned with your URL.
5. **Get LinkedIn.** LinkedIn is a great resource to find people, and for people to find you. To make the most of LinkedIn, be sure to include all of your recent jobs and relevant experience in your profile. Use descriptive keywords and post your Twitter account and website up there, too. Select a personalized URL (See tip #1). Once your profile is complete, start connecting with people you know and join some groups. Write recommendations for your colleagues, and participate in discussions.
6. **Facebook.** Facebook can be a great reporting tool — you can use it to find story ideas, background information and sources. It's also another platform for you to present yourself and get more people to see your work. If you already have a personal Facebook account and profile, you might also consider creating a Facebook Fan Page.
7. **Write, write, write.** Raise your profile by contributing to media blogs and trade publications like Quill.
8. **Tweet, tweet, tweet.** Set up a Twitter account and snag your username (see tip #1). Use it to connect with colleagues and tweet links to your work and theirs.
9. **Volunteer.** Contact your local SPJ chapter and offer to help out. You could serve on a committee, lead a workshop, mentor a young journalist, organize a panel discussion — It's a win-win: you'll be doing a good thing, and it helps raise your profile in the journalism world.
10. **Network.** Last but not least, make sure you get out there and mingle your peers. Attend conferences and training seminars. Need ideas? A good place to start is [JournalismTraining.org](#) and our very own Digital Media Events calendar.

What makes a good video story

By REBECCA AGUILAR



In television news you quickly learn what makes a good video story and what should be information put in a script for the news anchors to read.

Video stories have become a vital part of online and newspaper multimedia reports, but not every story should be turned into a video report. I thought I'd ask three television news videographers to help us in our quest to figure out what makes a good video story and when should it only remain a story in print.

Chuck Denton is a multiple Emmy Award-winning news videographer based near Los Angeles. He has 23 years of experience and has been a long time freelancer for CBS, FOX, NBC and ESPN. He's also won awards for his video editing.

Bonnie Gonzalez works as a one-man band for an Austin television station. She's been a reporter/videographer for more than five years, and admits doing it all has taught her to be creative and resourceful.

Jim Kent is another news videographer with a long resume. Jim has 10 Emmys and has been awarded Region 10 Photographer of the Year by the National Press Photographers Association. Jim has more than 20 years' experience and has freelanced for Fox and ABC. He owns his own company in Phoenix called [ArtGecko Productions](#).



What do you look for in a good video story?

Chuck: Are there "visual" elements to help tell the story? Covering a city council or school board meeting can be a snoozer to watch unless you can use video to help illustrate the issue. Sometimes local news covers a crime and has no crime scene video from the night before. It can be a challenge. Are the interviews dynamic? Are they compelling enough to keep folks interested in tuning in?



Bonnie: Is there action and lots of nat sound, or natural sound? That's the sound you hear within a story that really pulls you in and makes you feel like you're there. For example, say I was doing a story on fishing. I'd want to pick up the sounds of splashes, the reel, a fisherman's laughs or groans, and place a lot of emphasis on those sounds in the story. Watch a story with a lot of nat sound versus one without, and you can really tell a difference.

When do you know it's just a good print story and not really a good video story?

Chuck: It's a good print story when there's no real video to use or shoot to tell the story. Meetings come to mind!

Jim: TV is a visual medium, that's a given. I believe a great still shot and a well-written print story can't be beat when the story is complicated and complex, and can't be told in a minute and half in video.

How important is it to have good characters?

Chuck: Having good characters is always a plus, but boring interviews can be offset by compelling video and by keeping the sound bites short.

Bonnie: If you have an interesting character, viewers are going to pay attention. Journalists tend to look towards people who are energetic, emotional, etc.

Jim: What do we all remember about our favorite stories? Is it the well-written copy or is it that great opening or closing shot? Most likely it was that fantastic character that led us through the story. People relate to people, not reporters, besides, we all know reporters aren't people, right? Just kidding.

How important is it to have good sound bites and action?

Chuck: Great sound bites can portray emotion and incredible context of the situation/story you are trying to tell; a grieving family member, a witness to a crime, a victim of a scam, someone well-known who may say something outrageous or out of character. How many times have stories been made for television, because we have terrific home or surveillance video?



Bonnie: If there's no action how interesting of a story is it going to be? I once did a story on the housing market. My video was only different shots of houses and my interviews. Not too exciting, is it? Maybe I could've connected with a Realtor and got video of a person showing a house, otherwise it was a better print story.



Jim: I never stop shooting until I know I have great sound to tell the story. It's that important.

Here are some examples of their work:

Chuck's stories on CBS Evening News [Going with the Grain](#) and [Fallen Hero's Story Inspires](#). You can contact Chuck at chuckdenton@yahoo.com.

Bonnie's story on News8 Austin [Prehistoric Mammoths Debut in Waco](#) and [Junior Chefs Shine in Temple Culinary Class](#). Bonnie can be contacted at bgonzalez@news8texas.com.

Jim was one of the videographers on ABC's 20/20 report [Revenge Against A Religious Sect](#). Jim can be contacted at artgeckojim@cox.net.

The Flip camera: Small, convenient and easy to use

By REBECCA AGUILAR



Last month, I was at the mall when I saw some security guards tackling a woman with a baby in one arm and a purse stuffed with clothing on her other arm. At that moment, I wished I had my Sony Cybershot camera with me. I never thought I'd see a struggle in front of my eyes.

What I do know is two things; that video of the security guards and woman could have come in handy on a story on shoplifting, and I should have had a Flip camera in my purse.

Most of us will try to use the best video camera we can on a story, but in a pinch, a Flip camera is not a bad tool to have in your bag. There are several versions of this small camera, including the Flip Ultra HD that costs about \$200.

It's easy to use, because you press a button and you're recording. It's very convenient when you need to upload your video right away, because it has a flip-out USB connector. You can plug your Flip camera right into your laptop. Yes, it's that easy.

You can also buy an underwater case for your Flip camera. This is great if you want to take shots in a pool. I bet it would come in handy right now for those reporters covering the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

I found this video blog by a citizen-journalist who uses a Flip camera for her reports. It's an excellent tutorial:

<http://dev.freevlog.org/>



Here are some basics on the Flip:

Flip Ultra

- Fits in your pocket
- Records about 2 hours of video on 4GB
- Uses double A batteries
- Any standard tripod can be used with Flip
- Also has microphone

Flip Ultra HD

- Fits in your pocket
- Captures about 2 hours of HD video on 8GB built-in memory
- It comes with rechargeable AA battery pack
- Also has a microphone
- Any standard tripod can fit the tripod mount

Search YouTube for more tutorials on the Flip camera. Good luck!

How to edit video with Windows Movie Maker (in 7 easy steps!)

By EMILY SWEENEY



O.K. -- so you just shot some footage with your digital video camera.

Now what?

Well, if you're one of those kids who can't afford a slick Mac, and you're stuck with an ol' PC (like me), you can still edit and produce decent videos with [Windows Movie Maker](#). It's a standard video editing program that comes with most Microsoft media software packages. Nothing fancy, just basic tools and enough features to allow you to create some nice-looking clips. It's a good program to practice on -- once you know how to use one video editing program, you pretty much know 'em all -- IMHO, they all pretty much work the same way.

Now then, the only way to learn to edit video -- (and sorry for sounding like a sneaker ad here) -- is to just do it. Here's how you can get started, in seven easy steps.

1. First things first: [Connect your camera](#) to your PC and [transfer your video footage](#) to the computer. [Import the video files](#) into Windows Movie Maker.
2. Once you have some video footage to work with, [click and drag the clips to the storyboard](#) at the bottom of the screen. (If you have a lot of footage, it's a good idea to write an outline ahead of time, so you know where the scenes should fall on the timeline. Oh, yeah -- and once you start editing, don't forget to save your Windows Movie Maker project!)
3. [Trim and arrange your clips](#) as necessary. To shorten a video clip, use the "split" button on the bottom right-hand side of the screen. Delete the bits and pieces you don't need.
4. [Add some audio](#). Mosey on over to the **Movie Tasks Pane**, look under **Capture video**, and click on "Import audio or music." Drag your song of choice to the video clip where you want the soundtrack to kick in. (If you need to raise or lower the volume, right-click the music on your timeline, and then click on "can you guess?" -- **Volume**. Then adjust accordingly.)
5. Or maybe you want to add a voice-over. To do that, you can record a sound track separately, or connect a microphone to your PC, click on the **Tools** menu, and then click **Narrate Timeline**, and do it right there. You can record your voice to go with individual clips or do the whole movie all at once -- it's your call. But whatever you do, make sure you write a script beforehand. Seriously. Believe me, it's worth it. If you wing it, and try to narrate your vid on the fly, it's not going to sound good. (Believe me, I've tried. Don't repeat my mistake. You will not save any time.)
6. [Add titles and credits](#). To add written words to your video, just click on the clip where you want to add some text. In the **Movie Tasks** pane, under **Edit Movie**, click "Make titles or credits." From there, you can choose how many lines the title will have and how it will move. You can also change the size and color of the text.
7. Preview your movie. If you like what you see, then it's time to [produce your video](#). Use the **Save Movie Wizard** to save your project as a .wmv or .avi video file. Once your video file is ready, you can upload it to the web for all to see. If you don't have a place to show it off, you can always post it on a free video hosting service such as [YouTube](#) or [Vimeo](#).

So that's my 7-step tutorial on Windows Movie Maker.

The main sources of information for this article came from the Windows Movie Maker product guide and tutorials on the Microsoft website, and from my own personal experience. FYI, I've been editing video for more than five years now, and during that time I've used many different programs — Final Cut, Cyberlink PowerDirector, Avid and (of course!) good ol' Windows Movie Maker. But I must confess, Windows Movie Maker is not my first choice, and I don't use it that often. So, if I missed anything here, please let me know. I'm especially interested in hearing from any regular users out there — if you have any tips/tricks/hacks to share, please e-mail me or comment online.

How to annotate your YouTube videos

By HILARY FOSDAL

Two years ago I covered the start of the 2008 Republican National Convention for WXOW-Channel 19 in La Crosse, Wis. I arrived in Minneapolis the weekend before the convention began to get my bearings in the city. When my crew arrived I didn't want us getting lost driving around town or discovering too late that our media credentials were limited.

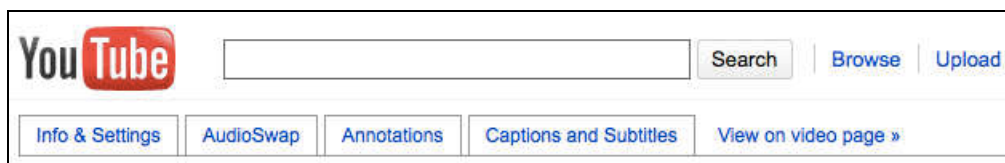
Of course I was also curious to get a sense of the atmosphere in the town. This was the first time I had covered a national convention and I had lots of questions along with the excitement that comes with a new assignment. While my husband and I were driving around the streets in St. Paul outside the Xcel Energy Center on Sunday, Aug. 31, 2008, we came across an anti-war protest. I suddenly realized that we couldn't follow them in the car, so I told my husband to stop the car. As soon as the car stopped I was running toward the protesters to catch up. I wanted to capture what was happening on my personal video camera. I had my cellphone in my backpack, so I knew my husband and I would be able to find each other afterward, whatever "afterward" meant.

The YouTube system makes it easy to add text bubbles, annotated notes or even highlight portions of a video that you want to draw your audience's attention to. The most time-consuming part of creating annotations for a video is placing the annotated notes in the appropriate spot on the video timeline. Once you have written the text you want to have appear as annotated text, YouTube makes it clear where the user should simply copy and paste, or write in, that text.

Below are the steps I took to annotate my video, "The other RNC 8."

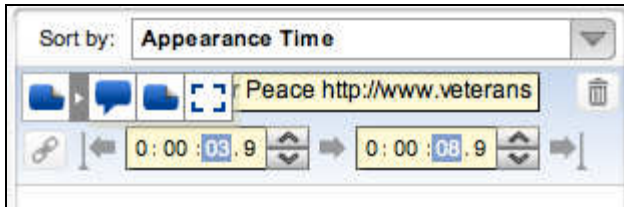
How to add annotations using YouTube video

1. Sign into your YouTube account
2. Click on your username and choose "My Videos"
3. Choose the video you want to edit and click the "Edit" button
4. Click on "Annotations"



Choose the annotation button.

5. Choose "Sort by: Appearance Time"
6. Click the play icon to find the section of the video where you want to add your annotation. Or, you can move the red cursor along the timeline.
7. Decide whether you want to add speech bubbles, notes, spotlight, video pause
8. The information for each annotation will appear on the right panel
9. You can choose to switch what type of annotation you are using by clicking on the annotation icon.



Editing the annotation can be done in the right pane.



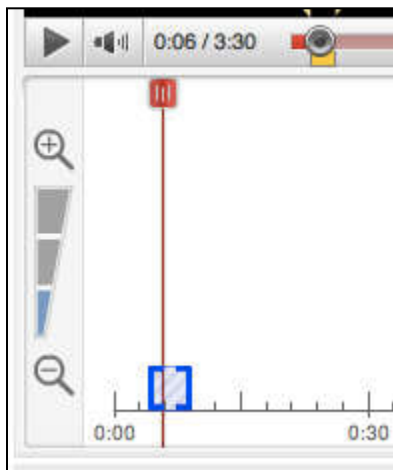
Editing can also be done in the video pane.

10. You can also change the size and shape of the rectangular box that contains your text.



You can alter the size of the note box.

11. If you decide that you didn't place the annotation in the correct location, you can move it using the individual time frames (see the top image under item No. 9 to see an example) assigned to each annotation or by altering the size of the blue brackets on the timeline.



Slide the blue brackets to move the location of the annotation note.

12. To delete an annotation, click on the trash icon.



YouTube annotation editing screen

13. Click on Publish when you are finished adding or editing your annotations.

[Click here to see the finished, annotated video on YouTube.](#)

Annotated video transcript

Annotation: Veterans for Peace participated in an anti-war protest at the Republican National Convention in St. Paul, Minnesota on August 31, 2008.

Crowd: Will somebody take the bullhorn, please?

Protester: We will continue on with the march the rally point.

Protester: If you go to the left, you will be participating in the civil disobedience. If you go straight, you will not be participating in that.

Police: We are also following behind the civil disobedience. Over.

Annotation: Many protesters along with a group that would later be known as the other RNC 8left a designated protest route.

Annotation: A casket representing fallen [Marine] Lance Cpl. Alexander Arredondo who was killed in Iraq was wheeled to the security fences near the Xcel Energy Center.

Crowd: Hey, guys, turn around. Give me the peace sign. David!

Crowd: What are they doing? Walking to jail? Hey, you all can go over it, too, you don't have to crawl under it.

Crowd: Be gentle! Be gentle! Be gentle! Be gentle! Be gentle!

Crowd: Better come quick, the cops are coming this way.

Police: Let's go back. Will you back all the way up? Thank you.

Protester: We're just trying to get there.

Police: Alright. Thank you.

Annotation: Elizabeth (Betty) McKenzie, a 78-year-old nun, and Jeanne Hynes walked through a security fence.

Crowd: We love you. Thank you for doing this.

Crowd: Are you okay? Do you need water? Let us know if you're not.

Jeanne: They have been explaining everything very nicely, but they're gonna bring in a team in to bring us downtown.

Crowd: Make sure you get vegan food in jail.

Betty: I'm Betty McKenzie.

Crowd: Betty, do you live in the Twin Cities?

Betty: I live in St. Paul.

Annotation: Elizabeth (Betty) McKenzie is a member of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet in St. Paul.

Crowd: And how old are you?

Betty: Seventy-eight. How old are you?

Crowd: I'm 34, I think.

Betty: Oh, well, you could be my grandson.

Jeanne: Well, that's one of the reasons why we are here. There are too many young men and women who are dead
□ I'm Jeanne Hynes. My message here today is □no war.□

Crowd: Who are you trying to deliver it to?

Jeanne: To anyone that is interested in hearing it and maybe some people who have not heard it before. Because we believe that marching with the veterans is a great honor.

Betty: There is never a justification for war.

Jeanne: If you've ever marched with a group of men and women who have been there and done that or who are parents and brothers and sisters of the dead and the injured it makes you feel as if you really owe them something. And we are willing to go one step further than just march.

Annotation: Eight protesters from the August 31, 2008 Veterans for Peace march were found guilty of misdemeanor trespassing. They were sentenced to pay a \$100 fine or perform 20 hours of community service.

BETTER VIDEO: Publishing

By JEFF ACHEN

This is the third and final post 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 Uncle Bob's 2008 Christmas footage: [Technique](#), [planning](#) & [publishing](#). This post deals with the topic of **publishing**.

Publishing video is all about delivering your video to a potential audience of millions. Sure, you can slap the video up on your news organization's website and cross your fingers for pageviews to go through the roof. The better alternative is to consider a variety of platforms for publishing your video in order to reach viewers where they are. These days, video publishing is about more than just posting your video. It's about making it embeddable, subscribable and mobile. Here are some tips for maximizing news video publishing:

- Understand that the current trends in digital video distribution now include 1) the web, 2) [Internet-enabled TVs](#) and 3) mobile devices ([Smart phones](#), [iPods/mp3 players](#), [iPads](#), etc.)
- Know which distribution tools will help you reach audiences through web, TV and mobile channels. I recommend the free platforms [YouTube.com](#) or [Blip.tv](#). (Paid platforms such as [Brightcove.com](#) or [Episodic.com](#) offer a bounty of features and publishing capabilities worth checking out if you have a budget).
- [YouTube](#) by far has the most traffic and is the most popular video hosting and sharing site on the planet. It is worth having a presence on YouTube even if you use another video hosting service. Benefits of YouTube, beyond the visibility, include [detailed analytics](#), [customizable players](#), and [near universal portability and integration on other websites and mobile devices such as the iPhone](#). Drawbacks include video uploads limited to 10 minutes, which rules out longer-form newscasts, shows and interviews. [Blip.tv](#) is free and designed specifically for regular programming including newscasts, shows, and feature videos. There is no time limit on videos and the Blip.tv player is even more customizable than YouTube's. Blip.tv is also designed with the modern [video distribution landscape](#) in mind. Through your Blip.tv account, you can have one-click access to publish your video to iTunes, most WordPress, TypePad, Movable Type, Blogger and Tumblr blogs, TiVo, MySpace, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Blip.tv is also working to bring its [videos to Internet-enabled televisions](#).
- Make sure your news videos are portable. This means making the hyperlink to your video a part of the news story. Don't just post the video on some obscure page on your site. Make sure you use hyperlinks to point visitors to your video from the story page and home page of your site. It's also beneficial to make your news videos [embeddable](#). This means allowing visitors access to the embed code so they can put the video on their own blogs and websites. Some newsroom leaders worry this is giving their content away, but I believe that strong branding in the video itself works for your organization when you allow others to embed the video on their sites. If there is a logo, watermark or "bug" on the lower righthand corner of your video, then your brand is being represented where ever viewers come across your video. Lastly, make your videos downloadable (syndicate them). This means enabling sites like YouTube and Blip.tv so that visitors can download or subscribe to videos. Blip.tv syndicates to iTunes, an online music and video store where people can subscribe and download audio and video for use on their iPods and other portable devices. We are entering the era when people are demanding this kind of portability. If your content is professional and relevant, folks will want to put it on their iPods.
- You can also "livestream" your video content. This means using services like [Ustream.tv](#) or [Livestream.com](#) to cover events or broadcast live to the web. With the right advertising and promotion, it's possible to get a high number of viewers for live events on the web. Especially panel discussions, prominent speeches and political debates and events.

Get better video from your digital SLR camera

By JEFF ACHEN

Quill isn't just SPJ's print magazine — it's a multimedia resource for all journalists. To accompany his [Digital Media Toolbox column in the January/February issue](#), videographer Jeff Achen made [this brief training video on getting better video from a digital SLR camera](#). Enjoy.

