

INTRODUCTION

The **Rodney King** beating by Los Angeles Police 30 years ago was a story created by the people that filmed it. In 1999 the Independent Media Centre turned the **WTO protests in Seattle** into crowd sourced news event allowing the public to uploads their own coverage with minimal editing. By 2005 citizen journalists in **Hurricane Katrina** were providing more accurate and detailed reports of the disaster through sites such as Interdictor. In 2008 during the US Presidential elections a site called **OffTheBus** supported by The Huffington Post provided alternative and often controversially transparent reporting of the US Presidential Elections. The **Iran Elections** gather huge International support through social media.

There was tens of people Tweeting different pictures and news snippets during the nearly **Queenstown flood** of the lake a few weeks ago. There are a plethora of local micro-brand community websites already in Queenstown and I dare say so in your towns too. Within our short lifetimes technology has changed the very way we live and communicate. The Internet is suddenly accessible and simple for the masses to use. As media elite, editors and publishers you are no longer in control - we are - **the people have a voice.**

As a newspaper you are losing your traditional stranglehold on community information - **Trade Me** and the Lakes Weekly Bulletin have stolen your classifieds, **Seek**, Trade Me and regional sites like Queenstown jobs are stealing your situations vacant, **Twitter and Google** is stealing the breaking news, niche sites are stealing your Google rankings, and **Facebook, Flickr** and **You Tube** are stealing your photos and other media. If you don't take it back fast there won't be anything left.

And worse, print media such as newspapers are increasingly considered an expensive way to reach your audience.

THE SOCIAL JOURNALIST

For todays presentation I have created the outline for a hypothetical role for the job of **Senior Producer, Social Media** (or Social Journalist) for a community newspaper here in Queenstown that is suffering from declining advertising revenue and I have come up with a 10 point sample strategy to derive increases in traffic to the newspapers website and subsequently monetize that traffic. These are a few ideas that sort of go from easy to hard and use social media.

I am going to start with a very **crude business hypothesis**: that you need to raise the number of readers to your website; you need to raise the frequency of their visits; you need to raise the length of time they spend on your website and the number of pages they visit because

- The more visitors you have, the more ads you can sell;
 - The more engaged your readers, the more likely they are to click on your ads or at least recall them later;
 - The more time a visitor spends on your page the more likely they will notice the ads
- ...and so on

Here's my **overall plan**:

I am going to utilise sites and services outside of the newspapers website to engage new readers, spread the word about some of the best stories, and do a better job at listening to the larger conversation on the Web. I am going to use these same sites to push the content and conversations out to where the community are. Some of these sites are obviously social media websites such as Twitter and Facebook.

Using some of these sites this newly created Social Journalist will reach out to the communities **citizen journalists** to post photos of fast breaking events, cover stories from a different angle than the legacy journalists and shape the news by crowd dynamics and velocity of information. This is the content they want - how do we know it's the content they want? They created it!

Between the social media and the citizen journalists the Social Journalist is the gate-keeper, the aggregating editor of the news.

And just as an aside through the use of a decent ad server you are going to match ads to content so that the ads are relevant to the readers and hence they are more likely to avail of the advertising.

THE ROLE OF THE SOCIAL JOURNALIST

1. Become the evangelist within the newspaper for social media constantly looking for opportunities to wrap social media into a story or report. Whether that be using eye witness reports, using a citizen journalists photos or citing some tweets or text messages.
2. Use social media tools such as Twitter, Facebook, Digg, Stumble Upon, Flickr and You Tube to actively listen and participate in conversations taking place outside of the newspapers obvious sphere. Basically looking for threads of information that can be brought back into the newspaper.
3. Take ownership of the breaking news within the community. Here is an example (adapted from a post by Misty Montano December 17th 2009):

7:30pm on the 9th May I pick up a Police Press Release from the Police website that they are anxious to find 37 year old local man Glen Simon who suffers from hypoglycemia. While the web guys are creating a story I upload the Police statement to Twitdocs and tweet "Queenstown police anxiously searching for local hypoglycemia sufferer Glen Simon last seen driving along Frankton Road - phone 441 1600 or 111 and link to Twitdoc - please RT". I post this both on the company Twitter profile and on my own profile.

I also start sending direct messages to my followers that have tweeted in the last hour or so (they might still be online). I appeal to them directly to help spread the message. A few immediately retweet my original tweet, a few others reword into their own words.

When the web guys get their own version of the press release up I tweet this report on the company profile.

The information has gained momentum.

I also post the request on the company Facebook page - different listeners. As some relevant information comes via these mediums I post this immediately on the Queenstown police Facebook page and notify them that I am doing so as opposed to hassling them as every piece of information comes in. They then decide what is relevant and what is not.

I have become the aggregator of the information - the owner of the news story. It is all about being first into the searches and into the publics insatiable hunger for drama with the content and images. My newspaper will subsequently dominate the headlines for this story for the next week, simply by virtue of being first mover and creating an Internet footprint of links straight out.

Some of the information that is sent in from the community provides even more content and in-depth pieces that could have been gathered via official police channels and traditional research methods. This information gives the newspaper additional content that is better than the competitors.

4. And the social journalist provides additional useful information on stories that the newspaper is covering, maybe a background piece, maybe an opinion piece. The social journalist might also cover and post items that may not make the news, like community gatherings or crime alerts.

THE STRATEGY

These are presented in an order purposely that they get more ambitious and presumptuous. Let's think big - start small.

1. **Hostage taking of the reader:** Attach related stories, most popular and commenting to all stories. The idea here is to get readers to not just read one story but to follow through to other stories based on comments or similar content.

The **most popular stories** should also be the most popular section of the website. It is easier for the readers to find the "good" posts, what is hot right now, what has always been popular, and what the editors favourite stories. It is well shown that readers do not search categories and archives well. In my opinion you should have popular stories as a predominant section throughout your website.

Commenting is essential for engaging the readers.

2. **Creation of viral loops:** share on Facebook,, Twitter, Like This, RSS feeds - Tweet main headlines

- a. When I was doing the research for this presentation many exponents promoted creating a Twitter taxonomy by breaking up your Twitter account into channels for National News, local news, sports, events, health, lifestyle etc. Story headlines are then automatically sent to twitter on publication. These sub-channels support personalised interactive messaging between the newspaper and the reader, promote citizen reporting and driving user generated content. A more personalised message means advertisers can match their advertising to their target market better - music to their ears. You could also do this for RSS feeds - which I think many of you did when I looked at your websites for judging.
- b. Facilitate a commentor tweeting and posting to Facebook while they comment. For example, Dan Roberts just said this "quote" about this article with a link to the article. The effect is to create a viral loop that capitalises on the social currency I earn by telling everyone I made a comment and thereby contributed to an online community.
- c. One big point is that comparative research has shown that the Share this button does not work. There is no point having lots of different communities that your readers can share your content with if it is not the type of communities they use. On the other hand a **single Tweet This** button dramatically increases tweets. I think this will soon be replaced in it's entirety by the Facebook Like This button. One of the important points in devising a social media strategy is to firstly understand your audience and where they hang out online. There is no point having Reddit and Digg buttons if your community base don't use these social websites. If you don't know what your audience wants from your paper within social media do some market research - try PollDaddy.com or SurveyMonkey.com.

3. Two-way relationship: contributor profiles, top commentors.

- a. Include links in the journalists names to profiles about the journalist. How long has this person lived in the community they report on - what other sort of global travels of interest do they have?
 - b. To get a lot more comments reward **top commentors** with recognition using something like a top commentors widget in the sidebars or footer of your website. Likewise show latest comments in the sidebar or footer and respond to each and every comment.
4. **Start blogging:** Blogging has in a short period gone mainstream, altering media landscape and the content of corporate messaging. Blogs are a simple way for people to create a journal of their thoughts or ideas in a format that any reader can follow. Material can be updated on a daily or hourly basis.
- a. Blogging is fresh content and Google thrives on fresh likes bees do on honey.
 - b. You can provide a less formal environment to share information of value with your readers and customers and build your online credibility. The conversational nature of blogs, the linking in and out of posts, and the commenting means that posts can be found more readily than traditional content and can also rank more highly in search engines.
 - c. You can directly engage your readers, receive direct feedback and respond to news in a timely manner. In fact, you will probably find that the feedback and rapport you build with your readers is actually a hell of a lot of fun.
 - d. I propose that community newspapers could engage bloggers that are not necessarily normal journalistic staff. They might just be opinionated community leaders.
5. **Create a personal profile of the newspaper:** A virtual man-about-town who offers political commentary, weather reports, photo sharing of anything, and even the occasional dig at other local news sources. Give them an iPhone and let them go. Love Queenstown example.
6. **Create online events:** Such an event might be based around a real event such as WinterFest or it may be a completely constructed event say based around the current debate of healthcare in Queenstown. If relevant, stream videos and podcasts, share photos, create daily discussion forums around related topics and reader polls and surveys. For example on the healthcare in Queenstown issue you could include video and MP3 interviews of different opinions of leading locals and well as a loud discussion board that suits the emotional nature of the healthcare issue.
7. **Create a collaborative community of Citizen Journalists:** Live-blogging or discussion group technology to provide interactive coverage of news stories and events including things like conferences and court hearings. I would give the power for the readers to upload real-time comments, audio and video postings, and polls. Then as a social journalist you would work with the news guys to embed some of these actually into the stories as I said before. Importantly the depth of the content associated with a story becomes much deeper online such that when the weekly paper does come out the readers are drawn to the website to get even more information.
- a. What about going even one step further **allowing the community to ask questions** directly to our local politicians and celebrities online, comment on publicly viewable answers, and to submit their own ideas for interview features. In this way you are giving the community some share in creating the news.
8. **Create mini-sites or grouping functionality:** Implement message boards, calendar functionality, Google map integration for community interest groups. As well as providing more interaction it allows advertisers to be more targeted in the advertising which subsequently can be charged at a much higher rate.

9. Promote and **monetize the community driven content**: for example Queenstown is an extremely photogenic place. How about creating a photo-sharing area where you would ask the community to upload their photos. Then you could produce an annual or seasonal coffee table book made up of the communities photos which which you sell. You could do the same with citizen journalists stories on events - the year in review; professional reports and photos can be augmented quite comfortably with community generated content.

10. And finally **burn your bridges**: Perhaps, just perhaps eventually you might dump the actual printed newspaper itself creating a much smaller virtual organisation - making the web the only channel of distribution and leveraging the history of the brand. Initially you might add as a supplement to the weekly paper - the best of this weeks online - driving customers to your website. Alternatively, you could offer downloadable PDFs of only the content that was wanted - maybe based on the Twitter taxonomy above. The economics might not be practical but limited print runs of almost personalised version of the paper might be the case in the future.

SOME PARTING WORDS

Best Practice Tips for Social Media Marketing:

- Relationship first, business second
- Contribute to the conversation - engage
- Respond - talk to your fans, followers or friends as you would if you were having a one-to-one or group discussion
- Be helpful, sincere and authentic - be a regular person doing a job in the same way as your readers are out doing theirs
- It's OK to disagree - respectfully;
- Be open to feedback and constructive dialogue from your online community
- Your fans, followers and friends are your teacher
- Be flexible and adaptable to making changes
- Test and analyse every change - use Google website optimiser

As a newspaper you need to be embracing the chaotic sea of change that the digital, social era is forcing upon you, In his article Newspapers and Thinking the Unthinkable Clay Shirky says "Society doesn't need newspapers. What we need is journalism". "You are going to miss us when we're gone" is not a viable business model - doing nothing is not an option!