

Convergence transitions



Tracy Anne Sena

*2nd Vice President & Chair of
Committee on Convention
Columbia Scholastic Press
Advisers Association*

In an early-morning, sleep-induced fog a few months ago, I heard a snippet of a radio broadcast that a major newsgathering organization was going to expand its number of bureaus worldwide.

That's right. In an era of shrinking newsrooms and declining ad revenue, international bureaus are on the rise.

News bureau (n) *One reporter with a laptop, a high-speed Internet connection (or satellite phone in really remote areas) and a \$150 Flip video/still camera.*

Welcome to the world of convergence media.

It's not enough for student journalists to write a well-crafted story anymore. If they want to get a job in a real newsroom — or be their own news bureau — they better be able to also take photos of an event, turn those photos into a narrated slideshow, capture and edit video, and then get the package posted faster to the Web than reporters from competing news agencies.

If there's any energy left before going to bed, the online reporter blogs about what happened behind the scenes, then puts on a suit of armor because more likely than not, some reader is sure to post a snarky remark about the reporter's competence or objectivity — anonymously, of course.

Although the thought of expanding publications — newspapers, yearbooks and magazines — into new forms of media can be daunting to advisers trained to produce more traditional “flat” media, Columbia Scholastic Press Association is committed to helping its members learn how to produce stories using new media and recognize outstanding storytelling and production.

Convergence 101

CSPA's annual one-day Fall Conference in November was chock full of new media sessions ranging from the basics of podcasting

to building your own Web site using open source software as a content management tool — all of which sounds a lot scarier than it is.

Podcasts are no longer just audiocasts. They can also be slideshows with narration — and yes, they can play on some models of iPods and MP3 players as well as most types of computers. Then there are just slideshows with captions or cutlines that play by themselves or by clicking, with music or without. (If you do use music, be sure you're up on copyright and your music is royalty free or someone on your staff created it.)

Podcasting and video shows are not just the stuff of newspapers — they're the new wave of yearbooks, magazines and other more traditional publications. Although the jury is still out on whether you'll be able to read any of the current multimedia formats 30 years from now (I'm glad my yearbook isn't on an eight-track tape!) — video podcasts and slideshows are also a great way for staffs to promote and sell their product where teens hang out — on Facebook, MySpace and blogs. Staffs that want to be relevant to their readers create Web sites with videos, podcast and slideshows to supplement their literary magazines — or they can spin-off another 'zine online that they don't have the funding to publish flat. Work can be encrypted so it can be embedded on other sites (like a video on someone's Facebook page), but it can't be downloaded or otherwise reproduced.

How to do it

Many student newspapers just getting started online are opting to take advantage of free hosting from the American Society for Newspaper Editors (<http://www.hsj.org>). The layout of the pages is static and doesn't leave a lot of room for changing the look of pages beyond color schemes, the flag and original photos and artwork, but for staffs just starting out with new media, it keeps the focus on storytelling rather than on getting the site to work. The ASNE site does accommodate video and audio, two of the fastest-growing segments of online media.

Schools with computer science departments offering programming courses — or extremely helpful IT personnel — are also great resources for recruiting student staffers and adult resources for building content-managed Web sites. Just as staffs recruit cartoonists and illustrators from the art department, consider recruiting in-house specialists. Make them part of your team. Praise — and food — goes a long way. Using open source software as your backbone is a no-brainer as it's free — and

there's a whole online community of support to help you when you're stuck.

New categories in Circle Awards

CSPA has just completed the biggest revision of Circle Awards in the organization's history, including 17 new categories for the Web, giving even more opportunities for recognition of outstanding student work.

New categories for newspapers include: Breaking news stories posted to the Web within 12 hours of an event on campus, follow-up secondary coverage in various forms, exclusive for Web-produced video. Newspapers, online magazines and online yearbooks have their own categories for photos with audio slideshows, site design, interactive graphics and downloadable publications.

@ A complete list of the Circle Award categories is available at <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/cspa>.

Multimedia Magic (continued from page 9)

the sound of the ‘chhhh...chhhh...chhhh...’ [the shovel is making] in the background,” he said.

To be a good videographer, Woody said, you should ask yourself one question: Do you like observing people? If you do, then he has some tips of how to become a professional-grade video storyteller. First, he says to learn about photos.

“You should take as many photography classes as you can in high school. That's where I started a long time ago. Even though still cameras are different than video cameras, many of the same concepts transfer over: How to understand how light works, how to understand composition, and what the eye is prone to,” he said.

In college, students interested in video should take as many hands-on classes as possible. Woody suggests trying some production courses, especially in television since that is an area where video is greatly used. Reading about photographers and what they look for in shots is also a good idea to expand the base of knowledge, Woody said.

But most importantly, he recommends just observing the environment.

“Read and observe because basically that's all we are,” Woody said, “professional observers.”

@ Check out the *Lawrence Journal-World* at <http://www2.ljworld.com/>. You can also try Poynter's News University at www.newsu.org.