



Educator's Column

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It's the first of the year and the traditional time for a reality check. How many in your newsroom are taking full advantage of the Internet? When they search for story ideas and do background research are they going beyond Google, Wikipedia and your competitors' Web sites? Are your reporters up to speed on Facebook, Twitter, and blogs? Is there resistance because it's new and they simply don't know where to start?

One technique, when faced with what seems to be a huge task, is to break it down into manageable pieces. Which would be less intimidating to your staff? Memo: please get up to speed on social media within three weeks and begin incorporating it in your daily output. OR Memo: we would like to incorporate social media in our daily news output. After looking at the information on these Web sites, let me know which seems most interesting to you at our brainstorming session next week.

Fortunately, there is a great deal of information that's easily accessible via the Internet (see the list of resources at the end of this column). The challenge lies in motivating your journalists to learn new skills and the technology. In preparing for the meeting, a good place for your team to start is by looking at RTDNA's archived webinar (a workshop delivered over the Web) Social Media Boot Camp from December 2009. Additional useful information includes tips for Twitter "newbies," ways other newsrooms use social media and some basic guidelines.

The next step is to hold a meeting where you follow the best practices for successful brainstorming. First, identify your goal for the meeting: "We're going to come up with three ways to include social media in our reporting." This is the creative stage of brainstorming, so set the ground rules up front: 1) the goal is to produce the most ideas possible 2) no one criticizes any idea 3) keep it positive. Reject no ideas, writing them all on a white board or note pad without comment. You'll sort out the best ideas later in the meeting. Your team will work much better in a nonthreatening environment where they feel comfortable.

There are a variety of ways your news team can use social media. Their tweets and posts can include links to your site increasing your Web-traffic. Your reporters can build their list of sources through the social media contacts. Searching Twitter is a practical way to gather information on the latest trends, developments and events happening around the world. Live blogs engage your audience by allowing them to ask the reporters questions. Remember, however, that content is key. Providing useful, up-to-date information creates a community and amplifies your station's credibility.

Once you and your team have the list of ideas in place, the group determines what can actually be done in the realistic or practical stage of your brainstorming session. Ask if anyone has doubts. Try partnering those who are more confident with those who have reservations. It may take a while for everyone to become comfortable with new ways of reporting. Keep in mind that social media are just another set of tools that help journalists do a better job. Some of us remember when computers started replacing typewriters in the newsrooms. A few folks resisted that innovation, too, until they recognized the value and efficiency added by the "new" technology.

Resources:

Social Media Boot Camp

<http://www.rtdna.org/pages/education/rtdna-webinar--social-media-bootcamp.php>

How is Your Newsroom Using Social Media?

<http://www.poynter.org/column.asp?id=31&aid=162287>

Twitter Tips for Beginners

http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/15/technology/personaltech/15pogueemail.html?_r=1&8cir&emc=cira1

Rules of Engagement for Journalists on Twitter

<http://www.pbs.org/mediashift/2009/06/rules-of-engagement-for-journalists-on-twitter170.html>