

reporter's guide to Citizen Journalism

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CITIZEN JOURNALISM

Finding a role in the realm of the bloggers

When the Buncefield oil depot blew up, the BBC received more than 6,500 emails from the public containing pictures and video footage. **Mike Ward** argues that news organisations and individual journalists cannot afford to ignore the technology or culture of the 'citizen journalist'

BLOG. IT'S AN UGLY WORD, inviting disdain.

Blogging is polarising opinion among journalists like little else. To some, it's an over-hyped flash in the pan; to others, its significance bears comparison with the invention of the printing press and the cathode ray tube.

To blogging, you can add moblogging (blogging from mobile phones), vlogging (video blogging), citizen journalism and Wikipedias. These are all manifestations of the same phenomenon — the public's newly found power to publish information, as well as receive it.

The worldwide web is a medium unlike any other. Before, print readerships and broadcast audiences were, for the most part, passive recipients of news, entertainment and information. They could influence what was on offer, by deciding not to watch a programme or buy a paper, but this was the extent of their power. The print and broadcast technologies only allowed a one-way, producer-driven method of information choice and delivery.

Almost at a stroke, the web changed the rules of the game. From the beginning, web users had the potential to choose what, when and how they wanted their news. Significantly, they could publish information as well as receive it. This "in-principle" change was evident from the web's earliest days, but it has taken over a decade for the potential to be fully realised.

Initially, mainstream news operations such as the BBC and *The Guardian* learned how to build websites that allowed users free rein to choose, so providing distinctive offerings. But the public's power to publish on the web remained relatively dormant. Anyone who has built their own website will know it's not as easy as sending a letter or writing an email.

But technology never sleeps. Mobile phones got in-built cameras. Blogging software developed to make setting up your own website simpler. By the turn of the century, the building blocks were in place for the current explosion of citizen publishing. Currently it's estimated that there are over 27 million blogs, and that number is rising exponentially.

Why do people do it? Blogs take many forms: some are personal diaries, others are debating arenas. More still are resource banks of links to other sites of interest. Many are all three.

Blogs are also opinionated. When the subject matter strays into the idiosyncratic — for example,

thrash metal bands from the west coast of America in the 1990s — many journalists may struggle to see their relevance, either as an opportunity or a threat, to mainstream news media. Making this judgement could be missing the point.

Rupert Murdoch sees the point. Last year he spent \$580m on the social networking site MySpace.com. Not long after, ITV snapped up its nearest British equivalent, FriendsReunited, for £170m.

Information marketplaces

What drives these acquisitions is the growing belief that people, particularly young people, will increasingly use their power to publish to create their own information marketplaces. Members of these online communities still need news and information to make sense of their daily lives. But, the theory goes, in the future they will be as likely to seek it from each other as from the professional journalist.

The view from within this blogging community goes something like this: why should we rely solely on journalists for our window on the world any more? We need to supplement and compare what we get from the mainstream media with the views of others, the millions now publishing online, some of whom will be experts in their field.

As Dan Gillmor, the doyen of citizen publishing, put it: "Journalists cannot hope to reflect the world as well as the world itself."

The blogger's scenario still leaves a role for the journalist as a part of the mix. But there could be more.

The coverage of the Boxing Day tsunami was hailed as a turning point for bloggers, when they came into their own, and provided a unique picture

"I believe the world will always need editing... the role of old media companies in the new media age is that of content facilitator, tools provider and editor"

Reuters chief Tom Glocer

of the disaster through a mosaic of personal accounts and breaking news. But *The Guardian's* director of digital publishing, Simon Waldman, believes that coverage "has shown both the greatest strengths of citizens' journalism, and its greatest weakness".

The strengths lie in the volume and vividness of the personal accounts, through blogs, text messages and pictures — a revolution in supply. "The great weakness, though, is the lack of shape, structure and, ultimately, meaning that all this amounts to. It is one thing to read hundreds of people's stories. It is another to try and work out what the story actually is," he says.

Waldman argues that the journalist's skill: reducing, prioritising and shaping information, aids understanding and adds meaning.

Reuters chief Tom Glocer seems to agree. He told the recent Online Publishers Association conference: "I believe the world will always need editing... the role of old media companies in the new-media age is that of content facilitator, tools provider and editor."

Murdoch, Glocer and others like them seek to be a part of Gillmor's new media "ecology" because, otherwise, they risk becoming increasingly marginalised in this new media world order. For the media magnate, commercial concerns are paramount. But the individual journalist also has little to gain from becoming irrelevant to their future audience or readership. The latest ABC figures for regional newspapers are a depressing reminder of the declining popularity of the printed word.

This challenge for journalists is a fundamental one. One of the curses of the internet age is that important issues such as these can be obscured by a miasma of overheated argument — such as in the recent debate over citizen journalism.

When the Buncefield oil depot blew up last December, the BBC received over 6,500 emails containing pictures and video footage from the public, the first arriving at 6.19am, just minutes after the explosion. Local press also benefited — the *Hemel Hempstead Gazette* received many emails and phone pictures enhancing the comprehensive coverage provided by *Gazette* reporters on their paper's website. By the next day, the site was providing half the top ten links on the opening page of the Google News search for the explosion.

Such public participation in newsgathering raised real issues about public safety; but it also sparked argument about whether this could be called journalism.

The National Union of Journalists indicated it couldn't, labelling those who sent such pictures as "witness contributors".

It also published a code of practice, stating that news organisations should check the accuracy of such contributions before publication and should "strive" to use material from NUJ members instead, if available as an alternative. Media commentators queued up to criticise the NUJ and its code. It was archaic, unworkable, not "real world", they said; the





PICTURE: ROBERT STAINFORTH



VIDEO STILL: BBC

Main picture: A shot of the Buncefield fire supplied to the Hemel Hempstead Gazette by a reader
Above: Amateur video footage of the Boxing Day tsunami

product of a Canute-like mentality.

It is too easy to get into a semantic tangle here. If, by journalism, we mean the full range of issue and event-driven coverage and analysis, it's probably going to give that description to a member of the public who finds them themselves in the middle of a breaking news story with a mobile phone in their back pocket. But to dismiss such contributions out of hand would be equally dangerous.

Condescension

The 6,500 Buncefield pictures are simply one manifestation of the public's power to publish, which is growing in range and sophistication. This particular example — and the London bombings earlier last year — simply brought it to the attention of the majority of professional journalists, who then "discovered" citizen journalism. The professionals now need to handle the interface with citizen publishers carefully. Any whiff of condescension could alienate the digitally literate still further, at a time when canny operators such as Rupert Murdoch believe bridges should be built.

Condescension would be misplaced for a number of reasons. Bloggers have their own code. It's not based on a professional requirement to be objective, just transparent.

Bloggers are open about their allegiances and urge and help readers to get other perspectives before making their own mind up.

Sites such as Digg get readers to vote for stories. Those with the most votes get promoted to the home page.

Those who doubt the seriousness of the people-publishers, and their ability for concerted collective action, need look no further than Wikipedia, the extensive online encyclopedia created by user contributions. They now claim more traffic than the CNN website.

Little wonder that Jimmy Wales, the founder of Wikipedia, recently told the FT Digital Media and Broadcast conference that mainstream media should now focus its mind on connecting with the growing number of online communities and social networks.

He believes mainstream media has a role to play in the mix: "Everybody makes jokes, but we still need professional comedians".

But how to do it? How does the professional journalist join the party without embarrassing the other guests?

One obvious first step is for journalists to write blogs themselves. *The Guardian* has been running its own blogs for over five years — writing more than two million words in the process, with an average of 10 comments per post in return.

Increasingly, individual journalists, including Melanie Phillips, Simon Waldman and Nick Robinson are blogging. Regional newspapers such as the *Carlisle News and Star* are hosting blogs by a wide range of local people and their own editorial staff.

Fuller integration

But fuller integration may need a different approach, and once again technology is playing its part.

A new site called Newsvine, currently being tested, offers some interesting possibilities. This provides mainstream news, but within an interface that also allows users to comment on, vote for and link to or from the news items.

Currently Newsvine is using international wire stories for its mainstream content, but the potential for national and local news organisations is clear.

Newsvine's approach appears to provide a platform for mainstream news organisations to link into existing online communities, create their own and get their professionally generated content integrated within the public offering. It is an opportunity to build those bridges.

The need is there. As *The Guardian's* Simon Waldman recently told journalism.co.uk: "A new generation of under-25s is emerging with radically different expectations of media. We can't just think of them as our future readers and users, but as the brand managers and media buyers of the future."

"We ignore them — and their expectation of us — at our peril."

Michael Ward is head of the University of Lancaster's journalism department and author of Journalism Online

Links

BLOG RESOURCES

<p>Creating blogs</p> <p>www.blogger.com</p> <p>www.typepad.com</p>	<p>Some British blogs</p> <p>Guido Fawkes 5thnovember.blogspot.com</p> <p>www.melaniephillips.com</p> <p>www.simonwaldman.net</p> <p>timworstall.typepad.com/timworstall/</p>	<p>www.hemeltoday.co.uk Hemel Hempstead Gazette's website</p> <p>www.newsandstar.co.uk/opinion/blogs.aspx Carlisle News and Star's blog section</p> <p>www.newsvine.com</p> <p>www.nuj.org.uk/inner.php?docid=1208 NUJ code of Practice on citizen journalism</p>
<p>Social networking sites</p> <p>www.backfence.com</p> <p>www.myspace.com</p>	<p>Other stuff</p> <p>www.flickr.com Photo sharing website widely used by bloggers as an image depository</p> <p>www.digg.com</p>	<p>www.OhmyNews.com South Korean online newspaper with over 40,000 citizen reporters</p> <p>en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page</p>
<p>Blog search engines and directories</p> <p>www.technorati.com</p> <p>www.quacktrack.com</p>		

BROADCASTING

Turning the digital deluge into news

Last summer, the BBC created a dedicated department to filter and verify the mass of video clips and images sent in by the public. As Martin Stabe finds, the unit is already being expanded to cope with the volume of submissions

WITHIN MINUTES of the mudslide that destroyed the Philippine village of Guinsaugon in February, the BBC had an eyewitness account. A friend of a rescue worker who was on the scene emailed the BBC via its website. He was on the air within half an hour, giving a graphic account of what had occurred.

The grainy images from the London bombings last July and the amateur footage of the Buncefield oil depot fire in January were significant in the growth in news organisations' use of amateur photography spawned by the increasing ubiquity of cameraphones. Whether it's a riot in Khartoum, an earthquake in Pakistan, or everyday life in Iraq, a witness with a cameraphone is rarely far from an unfolding event.

"Citizen journalism" is not a phrase heard frequently at the BBC. "User-generated content" is the preferred term in Television Centre.

Whatever the label, if anyone needs evidence that it is not putting trained journalists out of work, they need look no further than the busy newsroom of BBC News Online, where Nicola Careem, Felicity Cowie and Anna Stewart work.

Since last summer, the trio of broadcast journalists have formed the User Generated Content (UGC)

hub, a dedicated BBC unit tasked with sifting through the deluge of material that the BBC's global audience contributes to the corporation by email and text message, verifying its authenticity and legality, and ensuring that it is swiftly passed on to appropriate BBC news outlets.

"You don't go into this lightly, thinking you can sack a few journalists and get the public to do our jobs for us. It's just not like that — it's quite the opposite actually," says BBC News interactivity editor Vicky Taylor, who oversees the hub.

"The main concern we have with this at the moment is the volume — it's only going to become more and we need to ensure that we have the systems in place to deal with this. It's incredibly resource-intensive. You need to have staff to look at all this material and decide whether to publish it or not."

Indeed, the UGC hub is expanding: next month three more journalists will join the team, allowing it to work longer hours in two shifts.

Whether sent by email or text message, all cameraphone images and videos arrive in the hub's inbox. There, the first step is to verify its authenticity, accuracy and legality.

"You have to be aware that people may try to send you false information and false pictures. We don't publish anything until we've seen it and checked it," says Taylor.

Deliberate hoaxes and attempts to claim credit for others' work are less of a problem than well-intentioned members of the public sending interesting material for which they do not own the copyright, the UGC hub members say.

"Most people are genuinely wanting to see their work published in the best way possible. Very few people are trying to hoax the system, but you have to be aware of those who are," says Taylor.



They are wary of correspondents who do not wish to discuss their pictures on the telephone.

"You can usually ascertain from a conversation if they've taken the picture, and then you can ask them if they'd be happy to talk live on TV for three minutes," says Cowie, who mainly supplies user-generated material to BBC News 24.

In this way, the unit also supplies new sources and case studies for stories being reported by journalists across the BBC.

"We're almost like a news agency finding case

By Jonathan Munro, deputy editor

ITV NEWS

How many people do you know who don't have a mobile phone? Probably a handful — if that. We are shockingly reliant on them, and we carry them with us virtually everywhere. Within the next few years, most will be camera capable.

If you're asking whether that's good or bad, you're on the wrong question. It's happening, and we need to embrace it.

First, let's get the language right. "Citizen journalist" is a dangerous phrase and people in our industry use it every day. They shouldn't.

Mr Bloggs witnessing and filming an event is not a journalist. He doesn't check facts, find context, and look for second sources. He's more valuable than an eyewitness, who gets things wrong — passengers at Stockwell said Jean Charles de Menezes vaulted the barriers in his padded jacket, for example. They had allowed their brains to absorb chatter and overwrite their own memory.

Mr Bloggs with his cameraphone can't

do that. So I call him a "video witness". Better than an eyewitness, but miles away from being a journalist.

What if Mr Bloggs goes to an event just so he can film it, maybe thinking of his fee from a hungry broadcaster? Worse — what if he gets hurt there? You can see the responsibility claims pouring in. Or he offers up footage of a riot or protest, which, unknown to you, he sparked in the first place. All difficult areas.

As a starting point, we at ITV News will ask for pictures after an event, but not in advance. Culturally, we may all become more proactive, but at this very early stage being reactive feels better.

And it is an early stage. All sorts of issues will hit us, and it'll be rare to have a big breaking story without someone capturing it on their mobile. But we, as an industry, are good at change — and as our audiences increasingly use phones to watch their news as well as gather it — they're changing too.



ITV News secured amateur video footage of the West London arrest of the 21 July bombing suspects



Above: The BBC's User Generated Content hub, which will soon be expanding to cope with the increase in submitted video and images

studies and people we can go and interview to find out more about," says Cowie.

"It's no different from any other journalistic source — it's a tip-off. You then check it out and if it stands up, you publish it," says Taylor.

Once verified, images are passed on to another team that converts the files to the correct size for television before routing it to the picture desk and then onto a system where programme producers and output editors access the new user-generated material directly.

"Realistically, we could get something to air in five minutes," says Careem, who is responsible for feeding material about breaking news stories to BBC Newsgathering.

The London bombings last summer were a turning point for the corporation's approach to user-generated content. The BBC initially reported the police line that there had been power surges on the Underground. But the emails and text messages soon began pouring into BBC inboxes, telling a very different story.

"Email after email came in like nothing I'd ever seen before," recalls Cowie, who was working as a producer for BBC News 24 that morning.

"There were emails saying 'there are bodies all over the tracks at Aldgate' — really alarming stuff

"It takes journalists to verify, to think creatively, to think of innovative treatments for television, to maximise this content"

like that. We'd never factored in that the public would play such a massive role in breaking the story to us rather than us breaking the story to them."

In a second wave of messages, the cameraphone pictures began arriving — including the now famous pictures of the roofless double-decker at Tavistock Square.

The UGC was set up shortly afterwards to harness the phenomenon.

The Buncefield oil depot fire in January illustrated the massive increase in user-generated content over the following months, says Taylor:

"This thing happened at six in the morning and before lunchtime we had 5,000 emails in the yourpics@bbc.co.uk inbox, and most of them contained multiple images. This was a massive increase from about 1,000 images that we received on 7 July."

The BBC aims to give a byline to anyone who sends a picture, but what they can't expect is any payment, says Taylor: "As a publicly-funded organisation, we can't pay people."

"You retain the copyright, so if you want to go and sell your picture you are free to do so, but by publishing it on the BBC we're hoping people will get a platform, it will be seen and you can then do what you want with it."

While the increased use of footage provided by amateur bystanders makes some journalists uneasy, Taylor says the key task for journalists now is to find the best way to make use of this material:

"People have cameraphones and they want to be involved in the news — you can't uninvent it. As journalists, our job is to make the best of this content. It takes journalists to verify, to think creatively, to think of innovative treatments for television, to maximise this content."

By John Ryley, executive editor
SKY NEWS



For aeons, people have been recording their experiences — telling others their stories and sharing their eye-witness accounts. The difference is the speed of technological change. Technology is shaping the world of communication and creating new opportunities for us all — journalist and viewer. One recent survey said more than one in three teenagers is already generating his own content online.

At Sky News we use both in-vision vox pops and video sent in by viewers using mobile phones. On 7 July, the day of last year's London bombings, within minutes of our first broadcast, Sky News received dozens of images from the public, and hundreds thereafter. They made the news, including the chilling footage filmed on a mobile phone of tube train passengers trapped underground moments after one of the explosions. Hard, raw news.

On a breaking news story, where the onus is on being first and right, it calls for editorial vigilance and fine judgement to confirm the authenticity of such footage.

Events are moving fast. The mobile phone — along with blogs and podcasts — will become ways for both watching the news and making it. As communication becomes less paternalistic and more personal, the technologies and roles will merge. At the moment, the mainstream news organisations tend to see these innovations in isolation. The future could well be one screen made of multiple sources enabling you to watch, correspond, and contribute. All at the same time.

But what about enabling you to be the editor? I think there will still be a role for editors — not just to assess information, but also to prioritise and present it in a way which, as well as making the news understandable, also reinforces its importance and point. Something an "anything goes citizen journalism blog" can't do.

Professional journalists will always need to decide if it's news or propaganda.

By Nic Robertson,
senior international correspondent
CNN



PHOTOGRAPHED WITH A NOKIA N90

As I climbed out of our armoured car at the Iraqi checkpoint my heart was pounding.

I knew what I had to do, but now the moment had come: would I buckle? I had been trying out new mobile phones to see how they could be used to support CNN's field newsgathering. Test clips had showed that the phones delivered amazing quality pictures easily.

We are starting to get the technology on air. This is a new tool in our armoury. It helps us not just to tell the story, but to use it to get pictures on air first, and more importantly, get pictures where some don't want those shots seen. Which brings me back to Baghdad.

As I walked around the armoured car I made sure I'd hit the red button to activate the recording. With an hour's record time and 1 gigabyte of memory, I knew I could let it roll on. But would I have the nerve to point it at the armed guards at the checkpoint we wanted to film? Holding the phone by the screen and the lens towards the gunmen, I stepped out from behind the car and tried to nonchalantly strike up a conversation with our producer while carefully aiming the phone. It worked. We got exclusive pictures of the underground bunker where Iraq's new government had allegedly been torturing its citizens.

Within a few hours the shots were e-mailed and broadcast on air. Soon there will be no waiting, we'll be able to broadcast live right from the spot with our mobile phones. Please don't ask if I'd have the nerve to do that at a checkpoint.

SCOOPT

Opportunity knocks

THE TROUBLE with any start-up, especially a dotcom start-up in a brand new media space, is that you don't know any of the answers before you have to sell your house to find out. But you do need to know the right questions. In Scoopt's case, these were:

"Will anybody send us photos?"

"If they do, can we sell them?"

And, following a successful six-month proof-of-concept phase:

"OK, great, but is there *really* a scalable business here?"

That one was the killer. I'd already given up a freelance journo and technical authoring career, parked the family (ignored daily entreaties of "when will Scoopt be finished, dad?") and worked the statutory 25/8 start-up schedule for months on end.

We had "traction", whatever that means, with newspapers, magazines and broadcasters; we were fending off approaches from Silicon Valley VCs; we had massive media interest; and we were forging strategic partnerships with big players in media and mobile.

We were also selling pictures.

Not many, admittedly, but a simple extrapolation showed the potential. Ramp up from 5,000 members to five million and suddenly you're bigger than Reuters. What we had to do was reach a mass market of cameraphone-wielding punters who would be in the right place at the right time to photograph everything that happens everywhere. To the tabloids!

But here we encountered a curious dichotomy. While picture desks are only too happy to deal with Scoopt, the feature desks won't touch us. You can see why. All newspapers (and broadcasters) can solicit pics from their own readership for free, so they have a vested interest in not promoting a company that tells their readers not to be such mugs. It was also apparent that they didn't much relish us shouting publicly about how much cash they would pay for pics, so we judged it politic to shut up.

All of this pretty much ruled out a joint promotion with *The Sun* or a partnership with *The Mirror*. On a marketing budget of bugger all, we had to grow the brand through word of mouth, media coverage and partnerships instead. That's what we've been doing.

When we launched Scoopt, we suspected that we would be held to account on all manner of ethical issues. Weren't we encouraging people to run into burning buildings and oilfields for the sake of a quick snap and a buck? On the scene of an accident, would people whip out their cameraphones and take



Scoopt picture agency founder Kyle MacRae talks about the early days of the venture and why he has made few fans on tabloid newspaper features desks

pictures before calling 999? Would Scoopt stringers stalk celebrities in supermarkets and thrust cameraphones in their faces? (Sorry, Mr Cameron.)

So it made sense to launch Scoopt as a news agency on the basis that it's easier to defend the moral high ground when there's a genuine news story at stake. But inevitably, and gratifyingly, celebrity material started pouring in.

After all, it's not every day that a plane falls out of the sky, but there's a reasonable chance of spotting a celebrity falling out of a nightclub or a dress. And celebrity material is where the money is — particularly the kind of celebrity material that Scoopt is perfectly placed to broker.

You can stop paps at the door but you can't stop the public. When a young actress happened to be arrested for drink-driving in Hawaii, it wasn't at all surprising to get a call from a savvy New Yorker who had snapshots of the same actress getting pissed on tequila and snogging a barmaid the month before.

Photo opportunity, plus tenuous news angle, equals sales on three continents.

OK, it's not a particularly edifying line of work but ScooptSlebs is undeniably where much of the action is. The difference is that these days we're being more upfront about it.

So that's pretty much where we are. Scoopt was first into this market, just three days before the terror attacks in London last summer, and the first to monetise (does that word even exist?) citizen journalism. A few Scooptalikes have since sprung up and traditional agencies are dipping tentative toes into these waters, but we're ahead of the game.

Most importantly, we have answered that third question: there really IS a business here.

The plan is now one of rapid expansion through investment and partnerships. Any interested parties — or tabloid feature eds — please feel free to give us a call.

Martin Stabe finds out: what is...

SOCIAL BOOKMARKING?

The sheer volume of news available from the multitude of specialist blogs and news sites is arguably limiting the value of online news.

Helping online news junkies sift the grains of wheat from the mountains of online chaff are a bevy of "news aggregators" and "social bookmarking" or "tagging" websites. On these sites, users nominate notable stories from elsewhere on the web, categorise them by attaching keyword "tags" and determine their prominence by voting.

While bloggers and podcasters are challenging columnists' traditional monopoly on published opinion-writing, this new breed of website is challenging another function of journalism by replacing editors' news judgment with the collective wisdom of the audience.

Unlike traditional methods of indexing information around hierarchical categories, or "taxonomies", these sites use what is being called "folksonomy" — leaving it up to users to categorise information using any keywords they like.

The assumption is that, in sufficient numbers, users will quickly highlight important stories from the glut of data on the internet while developing logical categories that allow others to find what interests them.

Reflecting the interests of their early adopters, most of these "Web 2.0" sites are still dominated by technology news. There are still plenty of kinks to be worked out in these systems — links are often duplicated, indexing fails as users develop esoteric classification schemes, and there's nothing to stop false or even libellous information from being repeated — but they offer a glimpse of how journalism from disparate sources can be aggregated.

Journalists tracking particular topics can use RSS feeds generated

by these sites to watch for new items tagged with a particular keyword or noted by another user who they trust to be knowledgeable about their areas of interest. On del.icio.us, for example, it is possible to track the items selected by *The Guardian* director of digital publishing Simon Waldman (del.icio.us/50quid), former CNN correspondent and blogging enthusiast Rebecca McKinnon (del.icio.us/rebeccamack), or online PR expert Steve Rubel (del.icio.us/steverubel).



del.icio.us <http://del.icio.us>

While not strictly a news site, del.icio.us is the prototypical social bookmarking tool. With a few clicks, users can save bookmarks, label them with keywords and share them with friends or the public. Launched in 2003 by programmer

Joshua Schachter, del.icio.us was acquired by Yahoo! in December. Its minimalist design may not be much to look at, but its structure is impeccably logical, making the site the easiest social bookmarking tool to use.



Digg <http://www.digg.com>

Technology news website Digg allows users to add to a queue of stories and also add keywords. More importantly, it allows readers to determine what stories appear on the homepage and the

order they appear in by voting on whether they "digg" the link or whether it should be "buried". Founders Kevin Rose and Alex Albrecht also produce a weekly video podcast in which they discuss articles that have been highlighted on the site during that week.



Newsvine <http://london.newsvine.com>

Unlike other tagging sites, the Newsvine actually looks like a news website. It was launched publicly earlier this month after an invitation-only trial run. Newsvine combines wire service material from the Associated Press with blog entries or links to other sources

provided by users. Readers' votes, along with timelines, automatically determine the prominence of each item. Although it has localised front pages for many cities around the world (including London), Newsvine can be US-centric.



Memeorandum <http://www.memeorandum.com>

In a different format to the other sites, Memeorandum does not require its users to actively nominate content and vote on its quality. Instead, Memeorandum uses a secret algorithm, which automatically generates a new front page depending on what other websites are discussing and linking to.

Links

compiled by Graham Holliday

CITIZEN JOURNALISM PROJECTS

Backfence

www.backfence.com

Backfence is creating a group of community sites. Currently these are based in Virginia and Maryland in the US. Members can post comments, share photos, read local news, place classified ads, publicise events, find local businesses and share tips. It features items such as the next PTA meeting and reviews of upcoming plays and films. Backfence is free for users and visitors and is supported by advertising, Yellow Pages and classifieds. Registered users can post classifieds for free.

Bluffton Today

www.blufftontoday.com

Launched in April 2005, Bluffton Today is a community website that accompanies the *Bluffton Today* newspaper in South Carolina. According to the website: "This is a place where you take the lead in telling your own story. As a registered BlufftonToday.com user, you get your own weblog, your own photo gallery, and the ability to post entries in special databases such as events and recipes." It has over 2,000 members, 70 per cent of whom are women.

Felixstowe TV

www.felixstowetv.co.uk

Freelance journalist Chris Gosling runs this broadband TV news service from the Suffolk town of Felixstowe. It is one of the first examples of a hyper-local citizen journalism news site in the UK. Felixstowe has a population of 25,000 and the site now has an

audience of 32,000 unique visitors per month, which includes some expats.

iTalkNEWS

www.italknews.com

This San Francisco start-up is "a breaking news forum and a forerunner of a new kind of news journalism, where everyone can participate in current events". Articles are written and submitted by members of the public on any current affairs topic. Writers and readers rate each other's stories. Through a system of recommendations the community decides which stories make the front page.

London by London

www.thefridayproject.co.uk/lbl/

This site has almost 15,000 members — nearly all Londoners. Members "share information and advice about the capital through a weekly email magazine". It's free to join, although there is an optional £10 per year premium membership, which offers extra benefits. The community spawned a book, *London by London: The Insiders' Guide*, which is now in its second edition. With thousands of users adding their say, it's fast becoming the cult guide to London.

NowPublic

www.nowpublic.com

NowPublic is produced by a Vancouver-based company. NowPublic CEO Michael Tippet says the site has "just under 10,000 contributors and between 1.5 and three million visitors per month". It uses text,

audio, video and photographs submitted by members. According to the website: "Through this process, NowPublic combines the power of news readers, bloggers, photographers and writers to create fast, open-source news coverage of the most important stories emerging anywhere in the world".

OhmyNews

<http://english.ohmynews.com>

The Korean citizen journalism site was founded in 2000. It has 40-plus traditional reporters and editors and around 41,000 citizen reporters worldwide. It receives about two million page views per month. It is bilingual (Korean and English) and contributors earn a small amount from their submissions. Founder Oh Yeon Ho has plans to expand, and he recently announced that Softbank has invested \$11m to set up an OhmyNews service in Japan.

Ourmedia

www.ourmedia.org

This is a global community site that is "dedicated to spreading grassroots creativity: videos, audio, photos, text and other works of personal media". It promises to store all information on servers for free forever. The website says: "We want to enable people anywhere in the world to tap into this rich repository of media and create image albums, movie and music jukeboxes and more". Ourmedia was founded by Marc Canter, who is the co-founder of Macromedia, and JD Lasica, an editor with the Online Journalism Review.

DAM GILLMOR

Citizen Gillmor

A LITTLE over a year after he took the bold step of leaving the *San Jose Mercury News* to pursue his "passion" for the phenomenon of citizen media, Dan Gillmor posted a very frank letter on his blog (www.bayosphere.com) outlining why his mission to encourage San Francisco citizens to report on life in the area had failed.

Acknowledging "I wasn't in my element", as an entrepreneur, the former business and technology columnist outlined some of his conclusions as to why the journalism project that was supposed to be "by and for the Bay Area" hadn't worked. He feels that citizen journalists need direct assistance; that the tools are too techie; and that there is a need for incentives beyond "you do the work and we'll take the money" to get people to join in.

Gillmor also admitted he "erred" by taking the standard Silicon Valley route.

"I was trying to figure out how to make this new phenomenon pay its own way out of the gate, just as the traditional, deep-pocketed media, super-energised entrepreneurs... were starting to jump into the fray," he wrote.

But the author of *We the Media, Grassroots Journalism by the People, for the People*, a book examining the impact that the growing number of bloggers are having on the production and consumption of news, hasn't given up on citizen journalism.

His disappointment over the Bayosphere project has not dented his conviction that the citizen media phenomenon is creating "near panic" in the traditional media. "These are really troubling times, certainly for newspapers, and I think television is starting to feel it," he says.

"Traditional media are wondering if there is something that would be good for their businesses in trying these things. I think the evidence is that traditional media are adopting the techniques of the modern media in a fairly rapid way, with lots of blogs, lots of podcasts, things like that.

"One reason the US newspapers are trying different things is, I think, that the business model is almost visibly crumbling for certain types of organisations."

Gillmor doesn't want to discuss his failed project. He says in an email: "I'm going to let the letter I posted speak for itself for the time being."

But he is happy to talk about the new project — the Center for Citizen Journalism, (www.citmedia.org) a new non-profit organisation that has a goal to "assist and enhance grassroots media, with a focus on journalism".

The centre is affiliated with the Graduate School

Dan Gillmor believed in citizen journalism enough to give up a job in newspapers to launch an online community project — which failed. But, as he explains to Julie Tomlin, he hasn't lost his faith



of Journalism at the University of California, Berkeley and the Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University Law School.

Plans are still at the "organising stage", says Gillmor, but it will involve him teaching a course in Berkeley in autumn. The overall aim is to go into three main areas: research, analysis and advocacy.

"Re-inventing wheels is not my goal here," says Gillmor. "I'm very anxious to do collaborations with other people working in this area and help support what they're doing."

The issue of ethics is "absolutely" something the centre would address, Gillmor says. "It would be essential and I do have some plans in that area, including a workshop this year on the question of trust."

The Wall Street Journal Online recently drew attention to Gillmor's involvement as an advisor with Spanish internet start-up FON Technology SL — a position he declared when writing about the company in his blog.

Gillmor was angered by comparisons to the Bush administration's payments to conservative columnist and radio host Armstrong Williams to promote its "No Child Left Behind" policy.

"That group made extraordinary efforts to be transparent," says Gillmor. "To be compared to Armstrong Williams is really disgusting."

While he admits his knowledge of citizen journalism in the UK is less comprehensive, Gillmor says what *The Guardian* is doing is "interesting" and thinks the BBC has done some "viable" projects.

But he was amazed when he saw the NUJ's proposals for guidelines for "witness contributors".

"It looked like an effort of control rather than cooperation," he says. "Letting go of part of the operation is important, but I'm not suggesting that everything that traditional media should be wide open. Not everything belongs on a Wiki. Adding new techniques does not mean abandoning old ones."

But what the traditional media has failed to do "to any significant degree" is to "actually invite the audience in to the journalism," he says.

"That's what I think they need to do, but that's a much bigger step and I think it's one that will take a lot longer."

PHOTOGRAPHED WITH A NOKIA N950

BLOGGING

Panning for gold in the blogosphere

Blogging has become a respected tool for amateur and professional journalists, reports **Graham Holliday**, but for news organisations hoping to make use of blogs, the trick is separating the truth from the chatter

MOST BLOGS are of little interest to anyone but the author, their cat and a few friends, but delve deep among the 30 million-plus blogs and you'll find bloggers, or so-called citizen journalists, hounding companies, chasing down unreported stories, interviewing politicians and influencing the direction of government policy.

It is during the bombings in London on 7 July that many feel that the citizen snappers and scribes officially arrived. Some of the most iconic images and writing from that day came from ordinary folk whose daily lives were horrifically interrupted.

Alfie Dennen, who runs moblogging site MoblogUK (www.moblog.co.uk), uploaded an image that was taken by Adam Stacey (<http://moblog.co.uk/view.php?id=77571>) just 15 minutes after a bomb exploded near Kings Cross on the Piccadilly line.

"The image of Adam Stacey that I posted was an incredibly vital and visible example of the power that an ordinary person with a cameraphone can wield over traditional press in times of crisis," he says.

"The immediacy of moblogging as a tool overarches any possible issue of quality of image, and in a way, the granularity of the image here served to augment the visceral power of Adam's image. The future of integrated journalism definitely has moblogging in its palette, Adam's image served to highlight this."

Within 24 hours of posting the image, it had spread around the world, appearing in many newspapers, on TV, blogs and websites.

Dennen believes the free and immediate dissemination of newsworthy material by people on blogs, effectively circumnavigating old media altogether, is a critical new element in the news process. "I advocate the dissemination of vital information where possible without restriction. Legacy licensing such as Reuters can impinge this flow of information at times when its circulation is vital," he says.

Bloggers not only break news, they analyse the newsmakers.

The Rothergate case in the USA is the most notorious instance. In 2004, the Power Line blog (<http://www.powerlineblog.com/archives/007760.php>) questioned the authenticity of evidence about President Bush's service in the National Guard presented by veteran journalist Dan Rather on the 60 Minutes show. The evidence turned out to be based on allegedly falsified documents. Rather eventually apologised and resigned.

Ordinary men and women from all political persuasions collectively and rapidly destroyed the evidence presented by the veteran journalist. Strike one for citizen journalists.

Little more than a year later and bloggers are established newsmakers in their own right.

Loic Le Meur (<http://www.loiclemeur.com>) is a blogger and the executive vp and managing director of Europe for Six Apart, the company behind the TypePad blogging service and Movable Type software. He is one of the most popular bloggers in France.

In November 2005 he noticed that Nicolas Sarkozy, French Minister for the Interior and a future



candidate for the 2007 French Presidential elections, had left a comment on a blog that was criticising him. Impressed with the politician's involvement with the blogosphere, Le Meur blogged about it.

"I posted a note on my blog congratulating him and asked if he would accept an invitation to a podcast interview. I didn't email, I just wrote it on my blog. He replied and one month after my blog post, I interviewed him." (http://www.loiclemeur.com/english/2005/12/nicolas_sarkozy.html)

Le Meur published the podcast in December. The impact was immediate. "Very soon, two young bloggers in their twenties did the same with other political figures, from both the left and right. Recently, I podcasted an interview with Dominique Strauss-Khan, one of the top candidates in the socialist party. It had about 50,000 viewers. The format is different from a TV interview as we have the time to talk. This last podcast was for more than one hour. It's impossible to do the same in mainstream media."

Le Meur believes this is a trend in the French blogosphere. "I have already podcasted three potential presidential race candidates and many other politicians," he explains. "They all accepted my request to podcast them and some now contact me. What's interesting is that the press now view my podcasts and report on them. This week in the French press, Dominique Strauss-Khan was quoted three or four times on what he said on my podcast."

Tim Worstall is one famous UK blogger (<http://timworstall.typepad.com/timworstall>). He was widely quoted for his analysis of bloggers' response on 7 July, and wrote the book 2005: Blogged (<http://www.thefridayproject.co.uk/fridaybooks/blogged/>). He says many stories first reported on blogs, including some of his own, later make it into the mainstream press.

Much like the mainstream media, bloggers don't always get it right.

The recent sale of the British company Peninsular

& Oriental (P&O) to the United Arab Emirates-owned Dubai Ports World (DPW) caused great controversy in the USA. It raised concerns over the perceived security risks of having an Arab-owned company controlling US ports. Many prominent US bloggers repeated what senators and the mainstream media were saying, calling for the government to intervene.

All apart from one man, Kenton E Kelly, who blogs under the name Dennis the Peasant (http://dennisthepeasant.typepad.com/dennis_the_peasant/). Kelly did what the journalists and bloggers didn't do and went in search of facts.

"He was just about the only person who went digging into what was actually going on," explains Worstall. "People like popular blogger Michelle Malkin and Senators Schumer and Clinton were screaming about 'the selling of American ports and national security'. Dennis was the only person who went and read what P&O actually does — it operates some leases within the ports and has almost nothing to do with security at all."

The story spread from the blog to Reason magazine (<http://reason.com/hod/kk022406.shtml>), and the magazine paid Kelly to write the story.

The best of old media are looking at ways of incorporating the best of citizen journalism into their brands. Worstall thinks sifting through the vast blogophony of voices to find the genuine nuggets of excellence is the main difficulty facing newspapers that might otherwise be open to using blog content.

"Success will go to the editorial team that can mix and match the best of both. For, as should be obvious, the 500,000 UK bloggers know more, in detail, on any and every subject under the sun than the staff of any individual newspaper," he says. "How to pick out of the rabble that one voice that has the truth on any specific subject will be the difficulty."

Freelance writer Graham Holliday blogs at www.noodlepie.com

COMING UP

Nokia's Citizen Journalism Award — details to be announced in Press Gazette shortly

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