

# Hyperlocal Citizens' Media

Connecting Communities,  
Improving Journalism,  
Building Democracy

A research & development project conducted by  
The New Media Publishing Project class  
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## Executive Summary

The marching orders for six Medill graduate students in the spring of 2004 were to address a growing problem faced by metro newspapers: Suburban sprawl and audience fragmentation have hampered a newspaper's ability to reach and cover local communities. In turn, this affects the media's ability to play its role in a vibrant democracy.

However, the Internet gives every single citizen the opportunity to make her voice heard, and in some small way, play a role in democracy. Web technologies, at low expense, also offer people a chance to customize and personalize content and experiences.

Studies have found that citizens are increasingly contributing content to Web sites. More importantly, they are interacting with journalists via Weblogs, fan sites and forums.

The proposition that the New Media Publishing Project sought to test was that "hyperlocal citizens' media" on the Internet – hereafter abbreviated HLCM – can provide a new model for residents of a town or neighborhood to engage with each other, with their community, and, potentially, with journalists and the companies that employ them.

The six students, under guidance from Prof. Rich Gordon, launched a geographically focused Web site, [www.goskokie.com](http://www.goskokie.com), for Skokie, Ill., a suburb of Chicago.

Goskokie.com takes audience participation in the journalistic process to a new level by encouraging them to produce their own stories and fill a void in coverage by traditional media.

The way residents of Skokie used and molded the site to meet their informational needs provides evidence of the power of HLCM to create and mobilize a geo-focused online community.

Moreover, an HLCM site can serve as a journalist's tool to draw from and spur in-depth stories and perhaps most importantly, become a part of the community too.

Some of the most important lessons learned:

- Audiences are no longer passive and the roles of journalists and audiences are interchanging
- Citizens' media sites are sprouting across the country
- These sites are easy to launch and inexpensive to maintain
- Many people initially have trouble understanding what a site like this can do, and why they might want to contribute to it
- It is easier to get people to visit an HLCM site than to get them to become contributors
- Many citizens need guidance in how to use the tools provided on an HLCM site
- These sites have the potential to generate ad revenue

**Key findings** from our project are inserted throughout the report and collected in Section IX. **Recommendations** for citizens and media companies interested in HLCM sites can be found in Section X.

Did goskokie.com work? After five weeks of operation, the site had more than 200 registered users and was attracting more than 100 visits per day. It was not uncommon to check the site during the day and see five, six or 10 users online looking at the site. And an executive at Pioneer Press, publisher of the weekly *Skokie Review*, saw the site and asked the students, “Aren’t you in direct competition with us?”

We don’t think HLCM sites need to be – or should be – competition for traditional journalism. In fact, if community journalism is to survive and improve, traditional media outlets and journalists themselves should embrace them. In this report, we document our experience in hopes that it will help others interested in the opportunities offered by HLCM sites – to enhance journalism, to be sure, but perhaps even to improve our democracy.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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# I. Introduction

## JOURNALISM, THE INTERNET AND COMMUNITY

The primary purpose of journalism is to provide citizens with the information they need to be free and self-governing.<sup>1</sup>

And, according to philosopher John Dewey, “Democracy must begin at home, and its home is the neighborly community.”<sup>2</sup>

It’s become ever more difficult, though, to cultivate a sense of “neighborly community” in the United States. Suburban migration has created new neighborhoods and a proliferation of local governments and taxing districts.

Newspapers and network television, which once helped tie people together through shared media experiences, have lost audience share as people gravitated to interests that are narrower, more personal and closer to home. Among the results: declining voter participation, cynicism and political apathy.

For those concerned about the future of democracy, these trends are most troubling. “The press has become the ghost of democracy in the media machine,” New York University professor Jay Rosen wrote, “and we need to keep it alive.”

For media companies, these trends represent a significant threat – especially for newspapers, whose business model assumes that residents of a community want information and advertising geared to that community.

People remain interested in news about their town or neighborhood, but metropolitan newspapers can no longer (if they ever could) cover this kind of “hyperlocal” news for dozens – or hundreds – of communities.

Some of those who worry about the fragmentation of the audience and the loss of social cohesion say the Internet is exacerbating these trends by offering an infinite number of sites geared to narrower and narrower interests.

But others say the Internet, as the most open publishing medium ever, offers the potential of creating new virtual communities every bit as vibrant as the physical ones that came before them. Moreover, some say, the Internet can foster a new approach to journalism: one in which members of the “former audience” can collaborate in creating and sharing content that helps people be citizens in a democratic society.

There is evidence the time is right for citizen engagement on the Web. The Pew Internet & American Life Project has found that 44 percent of adult American Internet users –

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<sup>1</sup> Bill Kovach & Tom Rosenstiel, *The Elements of Journalism*

<sup>2</sup> John Dewey, *The Public & Its Problems*, cited in Robert Putnam *Bowling Alone*

more than 53 million people – have contributed content online. About 17 percent users have contributed written material on Web sites.

A hyperlocal Web site has the potential to offer citizens in every community, in every suburb, a voice and thus, a part in the democratic process – the very premise of journalism.

During the spring of 2004, a team of graduate students at the Medill School of Journalism set out to explore the proposition that “hyperlocal citizens’ media” on the Internet can provide a new model for residents of a town or neighborhood to engage with each other, with their community, and, potentially, with journalists and the companies that employ them.

### **THE CONTEXT FOR A HYPERLOCAL CITIZENS’ MEDIA WEB SITE**

The Internet can assist democracy by giving a voice to every citizen in every library, every office and every home. However, online or virtual communities are even more fragmented than their counterparts in the physical world.

Members of most virtual communities are connected only by a single strand. Seldom do members of a virtual community share more than one concern. The members of a Windows XP discussion group are going to talk about only Windows XP. An entry regarding Windows 95 is liable to be labeled off-topic.

Such discussion groups are just one example of the growing fragmentation of our society. The increasing sense of disconnection – reflected in declining involvement in institutions such as the PTA, church, or political parties – is coinciding with a decline in democratic participation.

The decline in civic and political engagement has occurred simultaneously with a decline in the audience for newspapers and local TV. For local media, the question at hand is the same that Dewey wrestled with: How to reconcile a modern, large-scale, technologically advanced society with the exigencies of democracy.

A solution lies, possibly, in the Internet.

Thanks to technology, if someone knows something in one place, everyone who cares about that something can know it soon enough. And what does everyone care about? Their neighborhood community – the home of democracy, according to Dewey.

The Web offers virtual communities for literally every niche and sub-niche in society. Geo-focused online communities have been slow to take off, but we found that they are now starting to emerge. **[See Section II and Appendix III.]**

Perhaps the single biggest advantage of a geo-focused online community is its potential to connect its members by more than one single strand. A hyperlocal Web site has the potential to offer citizens in every community, in every suburb, a voice and thus, a part in

the democratic process.

The traditional journalism model – relying on journalists to gather, write and edit the news – is difficult to extend to the town or neighborhood level. Even if there is revenue to support the costs of original reporting, there is ample evidence that the traditional, one-way, “broadcast” model of journalism is failing to engage readers and viewers. A possible alternative is to involve the readers in the journalistic process. This is already happening and we, as journalists, stand to benefit.

As cited earlier, the Pew Internet & American Life Project has found that more than 53 million people have contributed content online.<sup>3</sup>

"There is little doubt that fan websites are breaking — and making — news," reported a *Sports Illustrated* story, “and dramatically reshaping the relationship between college coaches and the public.

"Mainstream news media, SI included, monitor website message boards to take the public's pulse and, in some cases, look for news tips.”

The lesson to be drawn is that audiences are no longer passive.

In fact, citizens are becoming stakeholders in the journalistic process. The Associated Press exposed a Microsoft PR gimmick by following a lead reported by a reader on Slashdot.org. Weblog contributors beat a steady drum of criticism of Trent Lott for remarks he made about Strom Thurmond – ultimately leading to Lott’s resignation as Senate majority leader.

Some may argue that this is just an extension of a phenomenon that began with talk radio and moved on to the ‘zines’ culture. We see it as an evolution of a true multi-directional conversation.

For the moment, Weblogs, or blogs, often lead these conversations and function as forum leaders. The drawback of blogs is that readers don’t really have an opportunity to start their own conversation. The next step is to involve the readers even more and encourage them to initiate discussion.

There are financial incentives too – a \$2.1 billion<sup>4</sup> nationwide market for local internet advertising provides the justification for an HLCM project.

#### FINDING

*Audiences are no longer passive. The Internet allows them to participate in the process of reporting, distributing and interpreting the news.*

<sup>3</sup> Pew Internet & American Life Project, *Content Creation Online*

<sup>4</sup> Borrell Associates Inc., *What Local Web Sites Earn*, 2004

## II. The Project

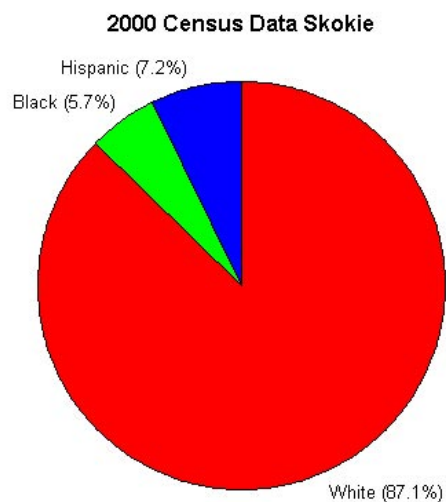
### ABOUT SKOKIE

The name Skokie comes from the Indian word for “swamp.” The Pottawattami Indian tribe inhabited the area, which was first visited by French explorers in 1673. The first settlement was established in 1834, when émigrés from Germany and Luxembourg transformed Skokie into a village, according to the [Skokienet Skokie History Center](#). Known as Niles Center for years, the Village of Skokie was incorporated in 1888.

Today Skokie is home to more than 63,000 people. While its racial mix is overwhelmingly white, Skokie received the largest number of new immigrants and refugees of any community in the Chicago metropolitan area in the last 10 years. As a result, Skokie residents speak approximately 50 different languages. We felt this diversity made Skokie an interesting place to experiment with an HLCM site and hoped we would identify communities within the community that could be tapped to make the site successful. We also chose Skokie because of its proximity and accessibility (it borders on Evanston, where Medill is based).

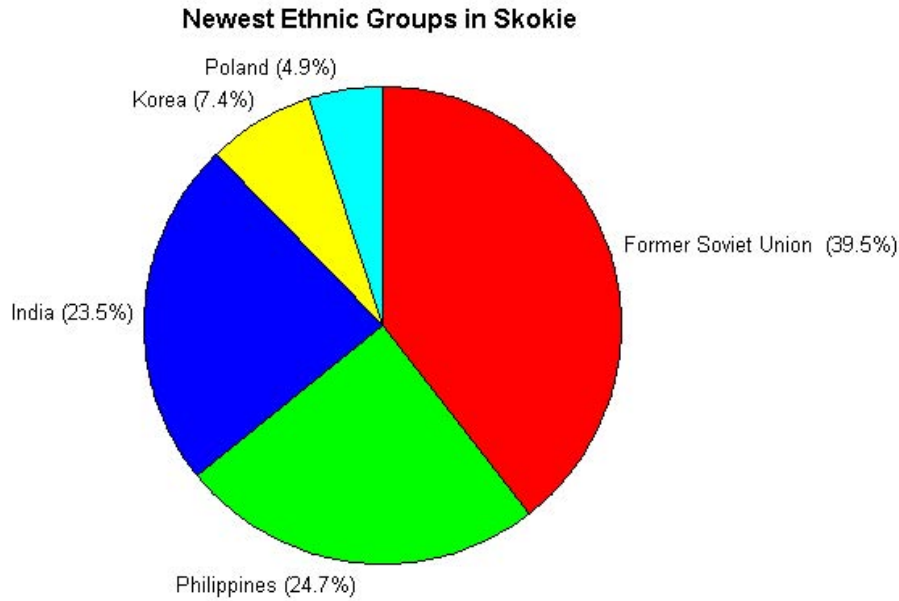
We found that Skokie is in many ways a typical suburban community – with a median household income at the middle-class level, a large percentage of homeowners and a heavy concentration of families, according to 2000 U.S. Census data. Some data about Skokie:

- 123,700 housing units (75 percent own property, 25 percent are renters)
- Average household size: 2.73 people
- Total households: 23,223, 73.4 percent of them are family households
- Median Housing Value: \$246,000
- Median family income: \$69,117
- Per capita income: \$33,613
- Four in 10 Skokie residents are 25-54 years old





The countries of birth most heavily represented by Skokie's new Americans are:



(Skokie Public Library

[http://www.skokie.lib.il.us/s\\_community/cm\\_cultural/index.html](http://www.skokie.lib.il.us/s_community/cm_cultural/index.html))

Skokie, however, is not a cultural or political hotbed. In part, that was part of the reason for basing the project in Skokie – it was chosen because it is typical of suburban USA, not because it has a particularly vibrant and active social or political scene. These characteristics probably hindered our efforts to identify hot topics to cover and build an active dialogue about them.

Still, Skokie’s demographics closely match the demographics of people most likely to create Web content, according a survey by the [Pew Internet & American Life Project March-May 2003](#).

	Who Creates Content		Who is Most Likely To Create Content	
Household Income	\$30,000-\$50,000	21%		43%
	\$50,000-\$75,000	17%		44%
<b>Skokie</b>	\$69,117			
Age	18-29	21%		45%
	30-49	48%		47%
	50-64	20%		43%
<b>Skokie</b>	Bulk of population: 25-54 years old Median age: 41.9			
Source: 2000 U.S. Census, Village of Skokie & Pew Internet & American Life Project March-May 2003 survey				

Skokie has 2,400 businesses. More than 700 are members of the Skokie Chamber of Commerce, which reports that nearly half (43.6 percent) have Web sites. Other facts about Skokie businesses:

- The chamber has at least three networking groups that meet regularly but do not have an interactive (Web) component
- Large retail hub at Westfield Old Orchard shopping mall and surrounding area
- Skokie's top employers: Federal Mogul, Rand McNally & Co., Topco Associates, Anixter Bros., Klein Tools, GBF Graphics, Rush North Shore, Castwell Products, Marshall Field, Nordstrom
- Skokie restaurants/Other Food Services: 166

A survey of community organizations found the following:

- Library – 16 adult groups, 12 teen groups/events
- Parks – More than 30 classes, sports leagues and groups that meet regularly
- Niles North High School
  - 70 student clubs (7 percent with Web presence)
  - 23 sports played
- Niles West High School
  - 69 student clubs (13 percent with Web presence)
  - 18 sports played

## **ASSESSMENT OF SKOKIE WEB SITES AND MEDIA**

Skokie is served by two weekly newspapers. The Pioneer Press' *Skokie Review* and Lerner Newspapers' *Skokie Life*. The *Chicago Tribune* has one reporter who covers Skokie, but her time is further split by covering nearby Evanston.

Existing Skokie Web sites serve as portals to more Skokie information, community rather than news Web sites. All pages are static with the exception of events calendar pages and those with sports results, which are updated monthly or weekly.

Here are some examples of the most frequently used Skokie Web sites:

**Village of Skokie - <http://www.skokie.org/>**

- About the Village of Skokie
- Community Development Department
- Corporation Counsel
- Economic Development
- Finance Department
- Fire Department
- Health Department
- Human Services Department
- Police Department
- Public Works

- Village Manager
- Community Links
  - Schools
  - Library
  - Park District

**Skokie Public Library - <http://www.skokie.lib.il.us/>**

- Information
- Kids
- Community
- Teens
- Programs
- Reading
- Audio/ Visual

**Skokie Community site - <http://www.skokienet.org/>**

- Arts and Entertainment
- Community Calendars
- Demographic Information
- Gov and Politics
- Library
- Clubs and Organizations
- Business
- Education
- Health & Medicine
- Skokie History Center
- Religion
- Social Services
- Local Media
- Restaurants & Shopping
- Sports and Recreation

**Skokie Park District – <http://skokieparkdistrict.org>**

- Programs
- Parks and Facilities
- Calendar

**[For a community content census – assessing what kinds of information are available about a community like Skokie, how easy they are to obtain, and how valuable they are to the community – see Appendix VII.]**

## OTHER HLCM SITES

In the last two years, HLCM Web sites have sprouted up nationwide:

- as an independent news source
- as an extension of a local newspaper and an outlet for alternative news delivery
- as a community participation news site launched by journalists themselves

Despite the varied look-and-feel and geographic location of the sites we explored, they share a similar blueprint:

- With the exception of fredericksburg.com’s relaunch of FredTalk forums in 2002, all of these sites **were launched within the last year**.
- The bulk of the marketing for these sites was a **grassroots effort** via word-of-mouth and meeting with community groups.
- All of the sites **were started to fill a void**, to create a niche within local news coverage, or to target a specific region within a community and further refine media as an alternative to what the local newspaper offers.
- These sites **have developed a loyal following** – from the FUGs ([FredTalk User Group](#)) of FredTalk – who regularly get together in person – to journalists who check these sites for story leads.
- In at least three of these communities, **there is a built-in audience** for an HLCM blog because residents are innovative and tech-savvy.

Interviews with the people running these HLCM sites provided insight on how to overcome the obstacle of getting site visitors to become contributors.

From **FredTalk**:

- Successful topics are specific; general topics do not generate much conversation.
- It rarely works for the staff to try to generate discussion; the users can see through it. Staff posts are often “thread killers.”

FredTalk is an informal forum and much of the information on FredTalk, the administrators say, would not be called news by traditional print standards. People are just as likely to type “What’s going on today?” as to discuss the latest news headline.

**WestportNow.com** saw success in:

- Immediacy, professional coverage of local events
- Photos

### FINDING

*Specific topics – especially those already in the news – generate the most discussion and participation.*

### FINDING

*Users can see through staff attempts to generate discussion.*

WestportNow.com has a high level of editing. Content does not appear on the site without being edited by its publisher, an experienced journalist.

**LiveFromArlington.com** found that photographs are very appealing to site users.

Administrators of FredTalk and WestportNow.com said it took a controversial topic to start attracting traffic and contributors. FredTalk benefited from ongoing coverage of a double murder case in which a Fredericksburg area resident was a suspect. Westportnow.com had the case involving Martha Stewart, who has a home in Westport.

**FINDING**

*Photos are extremely popular.*

**Northwestvoice.com**, the newest of the six Web sites we reviewed, has the advantage of being connected to a weekly print newspaper. The Web site and newspaper cross-promote each other, and advertising in the print edition brings in money that helps pay for operating the Web site. Thus, Northwestvoice.com has a built-in revenue opportunity from the print edition for its Web product.

At **LiveFromArlington.com** an e-mail listserv for people interested in town affairs was a reliable traffic driver that helped generate more registered users for the Web site. Both the listserv and the Web site could also feed off each others' content. For example, listserv content could be a source for story ideas on the Arlington Web site, and the Web site content can be promoted on the listserv.

**[For more details on these sites, see the chart on the following page as well as Appendix III.]**

Site (.com)	Audience, launch date	Instant posting?	Content prescreened?	Traffic, Users	Free Classifieds	Business Model	Print component
ibrattleboro (Appendix VIIA1.)	Brattleboro, VT: 12,000 pop., politically active, liberal  1 year+	No (anon. users can post, but staff reviews first). Comments on stories are instant	Yes	262 registered users (2 teen users), average more than 3 posts/day	No	First priority is that it is a community service site, but they hope to cover its cost. Ads range from \$20-\$3,648.	No
westportnow (Appendix VIIA2.)	Westport, Conn.: 50 miles NE of NYC, Web savvy, vibrant, affluent  March 2003	No (people can e-mail stories or call in leads). Comments on stories are instant	Yes, by journalist-publisher. Site also has a plug-in that sweeps the site for profanity.	2,000 page views per month	Yes, registered users may post free classifieds.	Joseloff would like to make the site into a hybrid of wire services, broadcast and traditional journalism writing. Ads range from \$25-\$1,000.	No
northwestvoice (Appendix VIIA3.)	Bakersfield: 250,000 pop., served by one newspaper, 40% broadband penetration, economy focus on agriculture, oil.  May 2004	Yes, for "trusted contributors" (who contribute regularly). Others undergo editorial review. No comments on stories are allowed.	User content goes directly to editor, user gets e-mail confirmation.	As of early June 2004, 1,300 page views on weekdays, 450 on weekends.	Offers free private party ads for individuals who want to sell personal merchandise. The first three lines of the ad are free, with a charge of \$2 per line after that.	In April, northwestvoice.com had 19 committed advertisers prior to launch. Ad rep works with clients to build ads with quark template. Exploring Google's text ad style and advertiser blogs.	Free weekly launched May 13, features 'Best of the Web.' Delivery: 21,700 households Newsracks: 4,300 copies
fredericksburg--FredTalk (Appendix VIIA4.)	Forum audience is small, intensely loyal group, good camaraderie (FredTalk Users Group).  Relaunched 2002, a few years after failed first attempt at forums.	Posts go up immediately, without editing.	No. Reactively edited, if a user complains about content of a particular post. Users generally police themselves for objectionable content.	6,200 registered users. 800-1000 unique users per week on the forums. User base is 70% female, 60% use forums 5+ days per week.	Forums has a swap/sell section that is free. Site classifieds are online version of newspaper classifieds.	Fredericksburg.com rolls online ad sales into print ad sales as an upsell. They run targeted banner ads and launched an online business directory in May. They estimated that targeted ads increased click-throughs by 8-12 times.	Free-Lance Star
Livefromarlington (Appendix VIIA5.)	Arlington, Mass.: 40% works in IT industry, 60% work in social services.  March 2004	Yes (users need to register first), and comments are instantly posted as well.	Uses profanity filter that automatically replaces objectionable word on filter list with "**deleted.**" Editors review.	220 registered users for site from listserv.	No	Hopes eventually to get 20%-30% of town to visit site over time. Site founder says he can run site now without revenue. If traffic exceeds his hosting server quota, he will need revenue source to cover extra cost.	No
masslive (Appendix VIIA6.)	Northampton, Mass.: 30,000 pop., large gay population  Weblogs launching 2004	Bloggers are signed up by the site; they are not edited. No commenting feature. Forums/chats are open.	Rely on users to notify them of objectionable third party postings. Advance corporate office receives user alert e-mails.	Newspaper has circulation of 18,000	Yes	Recruited seven bloggers, particularly those who had a heavy presence in Masslive.com's forums. Writers range in age from 22-50, get \$50 to contribute.	The Republican

## PLATFORM: MOVABLE TYPE VS. GEEKLOG

In the past couple of years, full-featured content management systems that are cheap or free have revolutionized Web publishing. Blogger and Movable Type allow anyone to create a Weblog. Geeklog, which was used by several of the HLCM sites we studied, and other tools offer added functionality. Of the sites, some ran on Weblog technology; others used discussion board systems. Discussion boards, or forums, have been around longer, so more people are familiar with them. But Weblogs have attracted a lot of attention in the past year or two. Discussion boards are easier

for users to contribute to, and when they are successful, can attract a large number of comments on a particular subject. Weblogs are more like a publishing environment, with authors having a greater sense of proprietorship over their content.

Forums typically follow a deep-linking format, so users must drill down to view postings or comments. A blog interface typically has the postings and comments prominently displayed. Also, we found that a Weblog platform can serve as the core of a site – with other offerings, including forums, revolving around the blog entries. A discussion board typically is a separate component of a Web site.

For these reasons, and the fact that most of the HLCM sites we looked at were using a Weblog system, we decided to use a blog platform for goskokie.com. We looked first at Movable Type ([www.Movabletype.net](http://www.Movabletype.net)) because Medill had an installation of that software running already and because it is arguably the software of choice for bloggers across the globe. We found that Movable Type is a powerful system for personal publishing, but was not suitable for our purposes for group interaction. For instance, it does not have a robust system for managing permissions for multiple users, nor for allowing people to register and post without an administrator's approval.

We selected Geeklog ([www.geeklog.net](http://www.geeklog.net)) as our publishing platform for the following reasons:

- Better user management, serves as a group Weblog
- Users can register themselves, with e-mail verification – allowing the capture of some user data
- Different sections/categories can be created in a snap and each section can be customized
- Wide variety of plug-ins available (from Weather to Forums to tools allowing creation of a personal blog within the overall site)
- Events calendar
- Every section can be syndicated using RSS
- Photos can be uploaded with stories
- Offers varying degrees of both editorial and user control

### FINDING

*Open source software has made launching an HLCM site relatively easy and does not require sophisticated technical skills.*

## DESIGN & COMMUNITY CONNECTION TOOLS

HLCM sites, with their emphasis on forming an online community and presenting user-generated content, have an interesting design dilemma. Not only do they need to display information, they need to guide users on how to interact and participate, and -- perhaps most importantly for forming a community -- display ways for users to interact with one another.

We attempted to design goskokie.com in such a way that balances the communication tools offered by the site -- allowing users to "talk" with one another -- and the content, which is something for users to "talk" about.

The design of goskokie.com began with a review of other Web sites, preferably those functioning in a way similar to goskokie.com. One site we particularly enjoyed was San Francisco State University Journalism Department's Golden Gate [X] Press online, [xpress.sfsu.edu](http://xpress.sfsu.edu).

We admired sites with the following characteristics:

- Clean
- Easy to find information
- Uncrowded
- Unintimidating; friendly
- Visual; numerous images

Goskokie.com's initial design was an attempt to reflect the above qualities. The site's layout was somewhat limited by Geeklog. The main limitation of the platform is that it requires stories to appear in the middle of the page, so many interactive features had to occupy a space in the left or right-hand column.

**FINDING**

*The choice of the content management system can have significant effects on how content is presented.*

A major concern of any news Web site is having fresh and current content. This is particularly challenging for a community Web site; because volunteers produce the content and there is no guarantee that they will deliver a steady flow.

We used several tools and techniques to keep goskokie.com fresh and timely:

- The most recently submitted stories appear at the top of the middle column. This has advantages and disadvantages; it creates a sense of constantly renewing content, but it means that even a post of little general interest will be prominently displayed on the main page for a while.
- On the front page, we include a list of links to the most recently submitted stories and comments.



- A plug-in on the homepage causes our user-submitted photo in the top right corner to refresh each time the page is clicked.
- The logo switches from a daytime version to an afternoon version at noon. At 7 p.m., it switches to a night version. And at 7 a.m., it returns to a daytime version.
- Over Mother's Day weekend, we changed the goskokie.com logo to reflect a Mother's Day theme.

"Clicks vs. clutter" is another major concern we had about the site. We believe that if something is not linked from the front page, it may never be seen. Subsequently, we try to put as much content as possible on the front page without it becoming cluttered.

We attempted to fight site clutter -- and enhance usability -- by using strong visual elements. An image can guide users' eyeballs through the text of a page. In our case, we created custom icons for each story topic. We also ran large photos at the top of the page whenever possible.

We also produced multimedia stories to enhance the visual appeal of the site, including video interviews and an audio slide show.

The video story packages were broken down into mini videos – accessible via one click – lasting between 30 and 180 seconds. The video stories, like much of the content we had on the site, were edited to initiate discussion about a topic with the goal of spurring site users to add more points and observations that would bring about a "full" view of that particular topic.

Sections of the site are broken apart by boxes with light blue outlines and a tab at the top containing the title of the section. The color was chosen for its "softness" and "approachability."

To further give power to users of the site, its appearance is customizable. Registered users can choose one of nine visual templates. They can also customize other features, such as the number and type of stories displayed, the number of sections displayed, the order of comments and even the language.

The site's design has been through three main stages as shown on the next page. Some features were added in response to users' comments. Others were simply ideas or techniques we thought of as we went along or finally got the chance to implement.

**[For more details on community connection tools, see Appendix IV.]**

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>1</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Launch on 4/23/04</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>MAIN FEATURES</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>2</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Mid May - "Less newsy"</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>MAIN FEATURES</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>3</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Late May - "More visual"</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>MAIN FEATURES</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Write &amp; submit stories directly from front page</li> <li>· Link to Photo Gallery</li> <li>· Main Story Topics</li> <li>· Who's online? showing who else is viewing goskokie.com</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· More white space to lighten it up and make it look less "newsy"</li> <li>· Top navigation bar redone; story topics moved to the left column</li> <li>· Weather module</li> <li>· Expanded story topics: Volunteering</li> <li>· Links to most recent stories &amp; comments</li> <li>· Custom story topic icons</li> <li>· Prominent search box</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Rotating Random Photo</li> <li>· Permanent welcome message</li> <li>· Expanded story topics: Jobs, Business Promotions, Shout Outs</li> <li>· Columnists section</li> <li>· Poll</li> <li>· Dayparted logo</li> <li>· Multimedia content</li> <li>· Instant Messaging</li> <li>· Audio blogging (phone-in stories)</li> </ul>

## MAKING IT EASY

We constantly worked to lower the barriers that might prevent someone from taking the step of contributing to goskokie.com. The audio blogging tool was one such effort – and it was used within a day of its being available.

We also set up a tool enabling people to post to the site via email -- by sending a message to [news@goskokie.com](mailto:news@goskokie.com), with the word “Skokie” in the subject line. Within a day of setting up that system, we received a “newsy” story about a member of Congress visiting a local school.

**[For more details on the project, including a blueprint for starting an HLCM site and a timeline for our work, see the Appendix section.]**

### III. Content: What Worked – And Didn't

The key question regarding an HLCCM site is: Who provides the content? Community-driven content is the goal. However, without some content when the site launches, most will not visit a second time.

We decided to provide seed content rather than have a static mockup. During this time, we produced a mix of original content and linked to existing content relevant to Skokie such as electronic newsletters and online versions of local newspaper stories.

By loading the site with editorial content, we risked alienating readers from contributing. If readers became accustomed to just reading the material we posted on goskokie.com – as they would with a typical news Web site - they might never have the desire (or see the need) to provide any stories of their own.

We had to decide on a writing style for goskokie.com. Indeed, several of the first stories we posted were articles reminiscent of traditional news media. These did not get many page views. We realized that if our writing looked too much like traditional journalism, goskokie.com would look like a typical news site. News sites do not evoke a sense of interactivity and discussion. We wanted to avoid the passive model in which people merely digest whatever the media gives them.

#### FINDING

*Short, readable postings in a conversational style are better than traditional journalism articles.*

**Quick, readable, informal “blurbs”**, we learned, are far more likely to generate user interest and response. So we aimed to have the stories spur dialogue rather than follow a traditional news structure.

We wound up with shorter stories, sometimes about lighter topics such as TV shows and local sports, told in a more flowing, colloquial dialogue. Comments were more likely to pop up beneath a post about the Smashing Pumpkins' lead singer Billy Corgan's radio reports on the Chicago Cubs than a story on a proposal for the town's new athletic field.

We also utilized images and multimedia elements on the site. When we attended events, we always had a camera handy, and post a story accompanied by a photo.

Goskokie.com includes many **multimedia features**, such as video coverage of local events, interviews and an audio blogging tool that allows people to post audio messages to the site by calling a phone number. The great promise of the Web is that it allows multiple ways to deliver content, and we tried to use as many as we could for goskokie.com. Providing users with visual and audio content, not just words, made the site unique among Skokie-related sites. We tried to think of goskokie.com as a portal with several engaging entry points – e-mail, audio, real-time chat, video and photos -- to foster interactivity and usage rather than become a bland delivery mechanism of information.

Based on page views, the two multimedia packages (Skokie residents talking about their mothers for Mother's Day, and local business people interviewed at a "Business After Hours" event) received the most traffic. This might have been because of the multimedia aspects; it also probably was due to the fact that the people interviewed told their friends and families about it, driving traffic. People always have an interest in seeing information about themselves and people they know.

#### FINDING

*Multimedia content featuring community members was among the most popular on the site.*

Multimedia works. In response to the video, one site user said, "I am sooooo IMPRESSED!!!"

Behind the Flash packages in popularity were schedules for high school baseball games – illustrating the value of **schools-oriented content**.

Schools also provided a **local controversy** – over the firing of a high school theater teacher – that generated the most discussion on goskokie.com. Having read about the issue in the *Skokie Review*, members of the goskokie.com team went to a school board meeting to cover the topic. At the meeting, parents and theater supporters asked the school board to reconsider its decision. They argued that nothing in the teacher's personnel file merited the dismissal, and that the teacher was being fired because of a personality conflict. We approached several of the parents and theater supporters after the meeting, explained our project, and gave them a flyer with the site address on it. Several registered and began posting comments to the school board meeting stories immediately.

Other postings that received considerable traffic represented **diverse subject areas**, illustrating the range of content that people might consider interesting:

- A rock concert review
- The final sentencing of a group of teens accused in a hazing incident in a nearby school district
- A story about the village lawyer's letter to Medill, demanding that we stop using an icon (for the "Skokie Issues" section) whose design was based on the village logo
- A complaint that "no U-turn" signs were needed on a busy street

**Commercial messages** – essentially classified ads or promotional messages for a business – also found an audience. A real estate agent, the owner of an air-conditioning company, a person looking for a babysitter and an “Avon lady” made posts that ultimately were among the 10 most viewed on the site.

The post that generated the most user feedback had nothing to do with Skokie. One member of the goskokie.com team posted an item about the previous day’s episode of “The O.C.” It’s worth noting that in addition to a handful of comments posted to goskokie.com, the author of the post, received e-mail comments from readers who were not comfortable registering and commenting, but had a lot to say about the topic. Again, referencing FredTalk, a lot of what appears on the site and interests people is not considered news by traditional media standards.

**FINDING**

*A lot of content that drew reader interest is not considered news under traditional journalistic definitions:*

- *Promotional messages and classified-type content was among the first content posted.*
- *Popular culture content generated significant interest.*

## IV. Marketing & Outreach

### PRE-LAUNCH EFFORTS

The initial problem we had in deciding how to market goskokie.com was how to sell something we had not yet created. We decided it would be best to create a version of goskokie.com site to use for demonstrations and screen shots for our media kits.

Our first outreach approach was to meet with leaders in the Skokie community. We spoke with representatives of village government, the public library, Oakton Community College, chamber of commerce and the student activity directors of Niles North and Niles West high schools.

We drafted a press release describing our background and the site's purpose and sent it out to community members, clubs, business owners, people we had met with and Medill faculty or staff who live in Skokie.

Meanwhile, we began to seed content to goskokie.com to give site visitors something to read. We also hoped to give them an example of the many topics that could exist.

### LAUNCH: GETTING THE WORD OUT

When we launched April 23, 2004, we had posted a variety of articles on the site and sent out a mass e-mail to community members and the local media.

Our next marketing campaign was a media blitz. The six of us divided our forces across Skokie, Ill., and within one week distributed flyers at Old Orchard Shopping Center, the mall parking lot, World Market, United Way, Corner Bakery, Skokie Swift Yellow Line, Starbucks, Oakton Community Center, Skokie Chamber of Commerce and the Skokie Public Library.

We included a blurb about our press releases in three newsletters: Skokie Chamber of Commerce, Chicago-Rogers Park Rotary Newsletter and the Lincolnwood Chamber of Commerce.

**New Community Outreach Project for Skokie and North Shore Communities** – Six Medill graduate students have launched the weblog goskokie.com as a community outreach project for Skokie and North Shore communities. It's a free way to promote your business, club, events and issues. Got news tips? Rants? Photos? Events? Post it on goskokie.com. We want to tailor goskokie.com to fit your needs and interests, so feel free to take the online survey at goskokie.com and click on the survey link. So start blogging! For more information, call Leah Gliniewicz at 847-491-2391 or send an email to [l-gliniewicz@northwestern.edu](mailto:l-gliniewicz@northwestern.edu).



Mention in Rotary Club of Chicago-Rogers Park  
District 6450 Newsletter

Throughout the course of the quarter, we established contacts by scheduling meetings. We attended the chamber of commerce's business networking meetings and met with student activity directors at Niles West and Niles North high schools. We also attended community events where we described the project and handed out flyers and stickers.

#### Meetings:

- Chamber of Commerce Business Networking Groups
- Brian Nolan, Niles North student activity director
- Pete Schauer, Niles West student activity director
- Niles West high school journalism class
- Frances Roehm, Skokie Public Library
- Cathy McCabe, Skokie Volunteer Services

We went to the Skokie's first State of the Village event, in which high-profile Skokie community representatives discussed village issues on a panel. We interviewed attendees and village officials and then posted the video footage on goskokie.com.

We also met with classes including Web classes at the Skokie Public Library and a high school journalism class. The instructor of the Niles West High School newspaper class even integrated our site into their curriculum by offering credit for articles posted.

#### Events

- Skokie Chamber of Commerce Business After Hours
- Niles North International Night
- Skokie Festival of Cultures
- Niles West Pasta and Pops
- Tour of the North Shore, American Cancer Society
- Annual State of the Village event
- Skokie Library Web classes

### **NEW STRATEGY: RECRUITING SITE CONTRIBUTORS**

We found that getting people to visit goskokie.com once was relatively easy. However, it was a challenge to get them to contribute content themselves. To overcome this challenge, we modified our marketing approach. Rather than simply telling people about the site, we helped them create user accounts to encourage them to contribute content to goskokie.com. At events we attended, we had people fill out a simple paper signup sheet requesting a login name, password and an initial story for goskokie.com. Later, we would create user accounts for them, put up their posting and email them saying their post was online and they could now post more.

#### **FINDING**

*It's much easier to get people to visit an HLCM site than to get them to become content contributors.*

We also created an incentive program for those who registered as site users. For example, at the Niles West Pasta and Pops, Tour of the North Shore and the Skokie Festival of Cultures events, we entered people into a goskokie.com raffle by asking them to create a user account. Then we told them to visit the site May 25 to see the winner. Using this tactic, we acquired more than 100 registered users.

### FINDING

*Explaining the concept of an HLCM site isn't easy. This can be done best in face-to-face settings.*

## ONLINE MARKETING

Our online marketing was two-fold. We wanted drive traffic via Chicagoland blogs and through search engines. In our effort to spread the word, we contacted local bloggers in hopes to bring contributors on board or get them to link to goskokie.com. Two Chicagoland blogs linked to our site and/or posted a blurb about goskokie.com.

Blogs:

Chicago bloggers <http://www.chicagobloggers.com/>

Gapersblock <http://www.gapersblock.com>



We also devoted some effort to optimizing our home page for search engine results. Because search engines list results, in part, based on words and phrases in the HTML title and near the top of the page, we modified the page title to include: "skokie news | skokie calendar | skokie photos" and incorporated the word "Skokie" into our site text multiple times ("Start a **Skokie** conversation," "Tell us about your **Skokie** Event"). Our tweaking put goskokie.com as one of the top 10 search results for the word "**Skokie**" on Google and Yahoo, and at the top of the list for "**Skokie news**" (ahead of Skokie's weekly newspapers).

### FINDING

*Search optimization is very easy to implement and can have a dual advantage: helps drive traffic and saves ad dollars.*

We submitted goskokie.com to 16 search engines. These sites either posted a blurb about goskokie.com or linked to the site:

- google.com



- yahoo.com
- dmoz.org
- daypop.com
- blogsearchengine.com
- bloogz.com/man\_en/add\_your\_url.php
- geeklog.net
- blogweb.org/add-a-blog/index.asp
- blogarama.com
- bloguniverse.com/radlinks
- blizg.com
- blogrunner.com
- portal.eatonweb.com/add.php
- blogdump.com
- blogwise.com/submit
- bloghop.com
- blogdex.net/add.asp

## OTHER MARKETING EFFORTS

We placed one ad (3.792 x 4) for two weeks in the *Skokie Life*. We also had goskokie.com T-shirts and stickers made, to be given away at events we attended.

Our marketing costs broke down as follows:

T-Shirts	\$340.80
Handouts	\$603.61
Stickers - 1000 count	\$251.00
Skokie Life ads	\$194.00
Event registration fees:	
State of the Village	\$150.00
Festival of Cultures	\$50.00
Survey and Raffle Expenses:	
Four movie tickets	\$40.00
Dinner gift certificate	\$50.00
-----	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$1,679.41</b>

### FINDING

*Promotional efforts for an HLCM site do not need to be expensive - use in-person, grassroots marketing and look for opportunities for "free" press coverage.*

## EVENTS: WHAT WORKED

Event	Description	Results
Business After Hours	Meet and greet with chamber members, took photos which were posted to the site	++ Recognition and site visitors
Niles North International Night	Handed out flyers to 300 attendees and discussed	+++ Recruited an enthusiastic photographer and news contributor (eugenef)
Niles West Pasta & Pops	Set up booth with computers and registered users for site and entered them into a raffle, handed out stickers and fliers	+++ 52 Registered users
Tour of the North Shore, American Cancer Society	Registered cyclists for event and goskokie.com, while entering them into the raffle	+++32 Registered users
Annual State of the Village	Handed out stickers and fliers	
Skokie Library Web classes	Demonstrated the site to a class and answered questions, handed out flyers and stickers	
Niles West Journalism Class	Demonstrated the site to a class	+ One column

Our greatest successes occurred once the site was up and running (so visitors could see what we were talking about) and when we could pitch the project face-to-face (because an HLCM site defies easy explanation). Schools were an excellent resource – attending events at the school and gaining cooperation from the high school journalism class resulted in the most user participation.

## V. Obstacles

We faced some steep obstacles in creating and marketing [goskokie.com](http://goskokie.com), many of which would confront any HLCM startup effort. Here is a rundown of the obstacles and our efforts to overcome them.

### WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?

One of our biggest challenges was explaining what an HLCM site is, how it might be valuable and why a citizen would want to contribute to it. Getting people to visit the site was not enough; we needed to turn some of them into content contributors. Even the basic vocabulary was difficult: for instance, asking people to contribute “news” confused people, apparently because they thought of news as more momentous than the kind of posts we were looking for.

Citizens are not used to blogging themselves. Often, people would e-mail us information instead of just posting on their own.

Another difficulty is that the average citizen does not think like a journalist. Instead of instinctively drawing on their experience and opinions to produce a story, they would ask us, “What should I write about?” After some probing, we could usually find an interest or issue they wanted to voice. But often we had to ask a series of questions first, such as “Is there anything going on in town that interests you?” “What are your hobbies?” “Have you seen any movies lately?” Everyone has something to say, but often we had to pry it out of them.

Others feel intimidated at the thought of putting something online for people to read. Some people said they would post columns, but ultimately backed out.

#### FINDING

*Many citizens need a little guidance in using the tools available on the site.*

The message below illustrates another challenge: unsophisticated users.

**Garage Sale** [Edit](#)


Tuesday, May 25 2004 @ 10:01 AM Contributed Views:  
CDT by:Anonymous 25

There is going to be a Garage Sale @ 8411 East Prairie Road in Skokie.

June 4th , June 5th & June 6th . The sale will run from 9am to 5pm all three days!


We are moving, we have a lot of nice items to sell.

Pls. do not come early!



---

**Garage Sale**

Authored by: Anonymous on Tuesday, May 25 2004 @ 10:03 AM CDT  
hi, i forgot to write skokie in my ad, can someone pls add it for me? 

[ [Reply to This](#) | [Delete](#) ]

- **Garage Sale** - Authored by: **Anonymous** on Tuesday, May 25 2004 @ 10:11 AM CDT
- **Garage Sale** - Authored by: **J2E** on Tuesday, May 25 2004 @ 11:19 AM CDT

Someone posted an ad for a garage sale they were having. Then, instead of logging in to edit the initial message, the person posted a comment below the message *asking us* to correct their post, rather than typing the correct information. He or she apparently did not even realize that the message would be every bit as visible as a correction to the above posting.

## NO “REAL-WORLD” BRAND ASSOCIATION

One of the most helpful things a hyperlocal site can have is an association with a print publication. A print product increases the value of advertising, gives people an incentive to post to the Web site and can drive traffic and discussion. Print also has an image of trustworthiness, helping lend credibility to its online component.

Without a print component, we were just six graduate students trying to sell something to the public. Starting from scratch, we tried to do the next best thing – get other people to write about us, which proved more difficult than expected.

The *Chicago Tribune* published a short article in its suburban news roundup page on Sunday, May 23 – but somehow managed to write a story about a Web site without including its URL.



Fortunately, the village of Skokie itself helped us – inadvertently – solve that problem. The village attorney sent Medill a letter claiming that our logo for the “Skokie issues” section – which we had modeled after the village logo – violated the village’s trademark rights. After consulting with an attorney, we think we might very well have won a court case if that had proved necessary – but we decided that “village goes after poor little college students” would be an irresistible story angle that would help us publicize our site. In fact, the *Tribune* liked the idea and wrote a second article with that theme, this time including the URL.

The *Skokie Life*, one of Skokie’s weekly newspapers, wrote an article about the site. And we attracted some interest from a local radio show called “From the Heartland” – recorded Sunday mornings at the Heartland Café in nearby Rogers Park. Members of the goskopie.com team were interviewed on that program on June 12, at the very end of the academic quarter.

A Brazilian Web site, *Journalismo Online*, also published an article about goskopie.com: “Cada cidadão é um reporter” (“Every citizen a reporter”) at

<http://observatorio.ultimosegundo.ig.com.br/artigos.asp?cod=275ENO001>

Despite several efforts, we were unable to get the *Skokie Review*, the larger of the town’s weekly newspapers, to write an article about goskopie.com. We had several conversations with reporters or editors at the *Review*, but no article was ever published. Perhaps the paper’s leadership was uncomfortable with what the site represented; in one conversation, an editor at the paper noted that the site had an area for classified advertising and asked, “Aren’t you in direct competition with us?”

### **WE ARE NOT LOCALS (STRANGERS IN A STRANGE LAND)**

None of the goskopie.com team members lived in Skokie. None were even from the Midwest, in fact. Every community Web site we studied was started by members of that

community. These sites work because the people running them are integrated into the community, know the town and understand the people who live there. There were times that we came across as outsiders.

## **JUST 11 WEEKS?**

Creating a self-sustained, community Web site is difficult enough. But the challenge was compounded by our narrow, 11-week timetable.

The tight schedule forced us to operate quickly, hustling to make contacts in the town while simultaneously designing and gathering content for the site.

We barely had time to make it into the local media and newsletters. For example, the earliest radio mention the radio show producer could give us was June 12 – two days after this report was completed. Similarly, the chamber leaving us out of the May newsletter meant over a thousand Skokians would not hear about goskokie.com until the academic quarter was almost over.

The time constraint also forced us to work hastily. Because we wanted goskokie.com to evolve as residents used it, we had to have it up and running well before the project ended. In less than a month, we created the site, filled it with content and launched it.

By comparison, in Bakersfield, Calif., Valley Direct Inc. spent eight months preparing northwestvoice.com before its launch.

## **WARY GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS**

Skokie's governmental bodies did not see goskokie.com's potential. At least some seemed to view it as an intrusion.

Village officials declined to participate in the site, and felt that we were using the village logo improperly. The library, which has many organized groups, seemed initially receptive to the idea, but balked when they found out they would not be able to approve site postings in advance. The librarians favored a model where they could pre-approve every post and reject material they deemed unfit for the community. This violated our goal of building a site driven by community members and our desire to enable people to see their posts immediately after submitting them.

The library did let us attend computer workshops, but librarians declined to post any material.

Our overall impression was that governmental authorities may see an HLCM Web site as a threat. The site can give a voice to people who may not express themselves directly to elected officials. It is also a community forum they have no control over, which naturally frightens them.

### **FINDING**

*Government institutions may see an HLCM site as an intrusion, nuisance or threat.*

## VI. Citizen Feedback

### ONLINE SURVEY RESULTS

We posted an online survey shortly after launching the site in order to obtain a rough idea of who the people of Skokie were and how they liked their media. Offering a chance to win movie tickets in exchange for taking the survey helped generate survey takers. Only 16 people filled out the survey, so we can't pretend it's a random sample of Skokie residents. But the findings may have value nonetheless:

- Only one survey respondent said he was “very familiar” with Weblogs.

*Interpretation:* This may just be a problem of terminology; try calling a blog a journal or a “group diary,” and people may understand the concept.

- All of the respondents but one said they were “very familiar” or “totally familiar” (15) with e-mail.

*Interpretation:* Encourage people to submit stories by e-mail, a familiar technology.

- 88 percent of respondents were “very interested” in news about their neighborhoods and 81 percent were “very interested” in news about Skokie.

*Interpretation:* Encourage users to post information about their neighborhood. Provide neighborhood stories at launch.

- 25 percent of respondents were willing to pay for access to a Web site “with more news and information about Skokie than [they] can find from other sources.” But those people were willing to pay only 99 cents or less per month for such a Web site.

*Interpretation:* It is unlikely an HLCM site could charge for basic access.

The overwhelming interest in neighborhood news seems to indicate this is a great opportunity for HLCM sites. Try contacting neighborhood watch groups and schools as a way to gain access to this hyperlocal audience.

### USER REACTIONS

The following quotes come from interviews conducted by e-mail with site users.

#### *What do you use goskokie.com for?*

- "Well, I have primarily used goskokie.com to show athletes their pictures and to promote the use of the site. I have been using the site to check weather and to check out some of the stories."

- Male, 18-year-old user.

- "I use goskokie.com the way I do, one, to gain knowledge of Skokie current events, and two, to get to know my neighbors. I believe strongly

in the power of community, and I think that goskokie.com is doing the Village a great service."

- Female, 24-year-old user.

***Do you like goskokie.com?***

- "I like the idea of community interaction, using the Web to provide personal interaction."
  - Male, 53-year-old user.
- "I love goskokie.com. It's fun, dynamic, and it gives me a window into the Village I would not have had, otherwise."
  - Female, 24-year-old user.

***What feature of goskokie.com do you like the most?***

- "Well a lot of things need tweaking but I like the graphics next to the stories, they are an attention grabber."
  - Male, 18-year-old user.
- "I like the comments feature, because it's fascinating to see people's reactions to all the different postings. Plus, as a column writer, it's nice to see if people have any reaction to what I've written."
  - Female, 24-year-old user.
- "I like the ability to express/advertise my own thoughts on things that are happening in my life."
  - Male, 53-year-old user

***What feature of goskokie.com do you like the least?***

- "Some of the features that I like least of goskokie.com would be that currently the site has [too] much freedom for a user."
  - Male, 18 year-old user.
- "It was never clear how long goskokie would last. Nothing lasts forever especially on the web. Goskokie I was never sure how long it [would] stay around."
  - Male, 53-year-old user.



## VII. Journalists' Roles in HLCM Sites

A hyperlocal citizens' media Web site is a multi-way street of communication. It resembles a conversation more than a lecture or presentation of information. It attempts to elicit audience participation, whether contributing information in Weblogs, text, audio, or video, or interacting through chats or forums. The degree the information or interaction is edited varies from site to site. But the general principle is one of audience-driven content. And because of the interactive nature, an HLCM site thrives on audience participation.

Dan Froomkin, author of [washingtonpost.com](http://washingtonpost.com)'s White House Briefing column, recently captured the essence of the communication process when he wrote:

*Consider if you were starting a "newspaper" today. Wouldn't you want to facilitate exchanges with readers? Wouldn't you want to encourage your readers to find out more than what you can publish? Wouldn't you want to make it easier for them to take action? Wouldn't you want to define and create a community? Wouldn't you want to make your readers feel important?*<sup>5</sup>

Froomkin, along with other proponents of blogs, is advocating a free exchange of ideas, one in which the audience functions as both a supplemental reporting and fact-checking entity. The reporting process takes life in interactive formats when the audience strengthens (or highlights weakness in) reporting by:

- Adding to the existing content
- Offering additional points of view
- Noting gaps or errors in reporting

And it is in this interaction that the journalistic process stands to gain. "[M]y readers," writes Dan Gillmor, a veteran newspaper and columnist at the *San Jose Mercury News*, "know more than I do—and this is a liberating, not threatening, fact of journalistic life."<sup>6</sup>

Playwright Arthur Miller said, "A good newspaper, I suppose, is a nation talking to itself." We are saying the same thing — at a local level. Yes, there may be misspellings, grammar errors and lack of journalistic style. But a journalist's eye should be able to look past these, and many members of the community will.

If news is a community talking to itself, our next step as journalists is to listen to the audience, to accept that we cannot know every fact, position, or angle to a story. Major dailies cannot thoroughly cover the news and events of suburban communities because of staffing and financial limitations. HLCM sites have the potential to fill that gap. "[O]ur

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<sup>5</sup> Online Journalism Review, [Ideas for Online Publications: Lessons From Blogs, Other Signposts](#), May 26, 2004

<sup>6</sup> Dan Gillmor, *We, the Media: Grassroots Journalism, by the People, for the People*

ability to shape larger conversations — and to provide context — will at least be as important as our ability to gather facts and report them,” Gillmor writes.<sup>7</sup>

The staff of goskokie.com – all majoring in journalism and planning careers in that field – took on a variety of roles in the startup process. Based on our experience, we can identify five phases where a journalist can play a constructive role in connection with an HLCM site. Some of these roles are not traditionally part of a mainstream journalist’s job description, but they are necessary to build a successful HLCM site. They are:

**1) Research/setup:** We examined what other HLCM Web sites were doing, what was working for them, what had not worked. During this time, we studied the look, feel, and setup of existing HLCM sites. We identified six sites that, in different ways, under different kinds of ownership, were trying to build hyperlocal communities:

- ibrattleboro.com in Brattleboro, Vt.
- westportnow.com in Westport, Conn.
- northwestvoice.com in Bakersfield, Calif.
- FredTalk at Fredericksburg.com, in Fredericksburg, Va.
- livefromarlington.com in Arlington, Mass.
- masslive.com (especially its forums and Weblogs) in Springfield and Northampton, Mass.

**[For more about these sites, see section II and Appendix III.]**

Using open-source software, we attempted to set up interactivity via commenting to engage users in the news submission and discussion process.

**2) Content creation:** We considered the chicken and the egg dilemma of which comes first – content or visitors? We decided to provide seed content rather than have a static mockup. During this time, we produced a mix of original content and linked to existing content relevant to Skokie such as electronic newsletters and online versions of local newspaper stories.

Whether populating the site with original content or linking out to information published elsewhere, we told our sources about goskokie.com — in an attempt to draw people into the conversations. We told people we met at events about the site, and made it clear how we would be using photos or interviews we gathered at these events.

**3) Ongoing editorial oversight:** To make the site interesting and usable, we tweaked the design, moved items around on the home page and simplified the ways in which the audience could participate. We found that maintaining an HLCM site requires ongoing efforts to suit the needs of the users.

A critical decision for managers of an HLCM site is how much editorial control to impose. The sites we studied exerted very different amounts of editorial control. At one

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<sup>7</sup> Dan Gillmor, *We, the Media: Grassroots Journalism, by the People, for the People*, pg. 5

end, Westportnow.com founder Gordon Joseloff personally reviews every content contribution before it goes online. But at FredTalk and masslive.com, participants can post immediately, with other members having the ability to file an objection to a post and have the staff review the content.

Here are some of the potential reasons an HLCM site might want to have someone with journalistic training involved:

#### FINDING

*A key decision is the amount of editorial control to impose. Too much will squelch participation; too little will inhibit people concerned about inappropriate content.*

- **Editing** – WestportNow.com calls itself a 100 percent professional community site. Publisher Gordon Joseloff edits for spelling, grammar and libel potential. The editing keeps the site looking professional. We chose not to edit prior to posting – partly to minimize the number of barriers to posting content and partly to study what kinds of content would be posted.
- **Averting libel** – Journalists are trained to word things carefully, to use vocabulary such as “arrested in connection with.” When we mentioned the site to a Skokie police officer, he immediately expressed concern that a community member might post information to the site that could be damaging to due process.
- **General housekeeping** – What should be done if someone objects to a post? We did not experience any abuses, except for a few “comment spam” posts, which were deleted. Our research indicates that self-sustained communities tend to police each other, and that users let other users know if a post was not on topic, belongs in a different part of the site, or was simply in poor taste. On goskokie.com, we implemented an “alert button,” which links to a form that users can fill out to complain to site administrators. During our project, there was not a single use of the alert button.

**4) Design/usability response phase:** Until people start to use an HLCM site, it’s impossible to predict what they will do with it. Each community is different; specific content areas and functionality are more important for some users than for others. We moved content around on the home page, added new sections and changed interfaces to make tools (such as the photo-upload system) more usable.

**5) Site promotion phase:** To expose the site to the community, there is no substitute for making appearances in public. We attended numerous community events and met with key leaders in Skokie. At a traditional publication, this kind of activity might be considered marketing, not journalism. But it is essential to an HLCM site’s success, which was our main goal.

**6) Story harvesting phase:** A great benefit of an HLCM site is that it can function as a source of story ideas for traditional media outlets. In the very last week of our project, one member of the community posted a link to eBay, where a group of graduating seniors had, as a prank, put their high school up for auction. Two days later, this was a Metro section front story in the Chicago Tribune.

We recognize that many mainstream journalists might not be interested in some (or all) of these job responsibilities. Launching an HLCM site is certainly a different kind of job than that of a reporter or editor. But if you go back to the role of journalism in the society – “to provide citizens with the information they need to be free and self-governing,” according to Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel – journalists should want these kinds of sites to flourish. So we think it’s perfectly appropriate, and perhaps even essential to our neighborhoods and communities, for journalists to get involved in launching and operating HLCM sites.

## VIII. Postscript

Goskokie.com, we believe, demonstrated the potential of a HLCM site – and the feasibility of launching one with modest investments of time and money, and with modest technical skills.

The 11-week timeframe of the project – half of it devoted to getting the site launched and populated with startup content – was a huge obstacle. For one thing, we didn't have enough time to tap into the countless community groups, youth sports teams, churches, ethnic communities, businesses and organization that drew us to Skokie in the first place.

Still, when our academic quarter ended, the site had more than 200 registered users and was attracting more than 100 visits per day. We were particularly encouraged by a few early adopters of the site who frequently visited and contributed content to the site. For at least some Skokie residents, the site was filling a need – helping them to be heard, and to hear from, fellow community members. There were signs of momentum beginning to build, a community beginning to form.

A few weeks after the quarter ended, much of the activity on the site had diminished. Apparently we had not succeeded in building whatever “critical mass” was necessary for the community to sustain itself. But Medill is not giving up on goskokie.com. Medill will host the site indefinitely and is talking with community organizations and potential funders that might be interested in keeping the site alive.

Regardless of what happens to goskokie.com in the future, it's clear from our experience that an HLCM site has the potential to create and mobilize a geo-targeted online community. Moreover, such a site can help improve both the quality of journalism in a town or neighborhood, and can help journalists connect with the communities they cover.

## IX. Summary of Findings

- **Audiences are no longer passive.** The Internet allows them to participate in the process of reporting, distributing and interpreting the news.
- **Hyperlocal citizens' media sites are being created nationwide.**
- **Open source software has made launching an HLCM site relatively easy.** The software is inexpensive, or even free, and sophisticated technical skills are not required.
- **The choice of the content management system can have significant effects on how content is presented.**
- **Specific topics – especially those already in the news – generate the most discussion and participation.**
- **Users can see through staff attempts to generate discussion.** One site administrator calls these “thread-killers.”
- **Photos are extremely popular.** This will only increase with the proliferation of digital cameras and camera phones.
- **Short, readable postings in a conversational style are better than traditional journalism articles.** Articles did not draw much interest or reaction from users.
- **Commercial messages – people promoting their businesses or using the site in ways similar to classified advertising – were among the first kinds of content to be submitted.**
- **Readers respond to postings about pop culture and other subjects that don't necessarily meet the definition of news as journalists tend to define it.**
- **Multimedia postings featuring people who live in the community were popular.** This may have been because of the “cool” factor associated with multimedia, but another factor is that this kind of content can be spread “virally” as people featured tell their friends and families to check out the site.
- **It's much easier to get people to visit an HLCM site than to get them to become content contributors.**
- **It's relatively easy to optimize your site to be found by people searching the Web using search engines.**
- **Explaining the concept of an HLCM site can be challenging.** This can be done best in face-to-face settings.

- **Promotional efforts for an HLCM site do not need to be expensive.** We used in-person, grassroots marketing and found opportunities for “free” press coverage.
- **Many citizens need a little guidance in using the tools available on the site.**
- **Government institutions may see an HLCM site as an intrusion, nuisance or threat.**
- **It’s perfectly appropriate, and perhaps even essential to our neighborhoods and communities, for journalists to get involved in launching and operating HLCM sites.**

## X. Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on our experience in launching and running an HLCM site, on our research into other sites like it, and on our observations of what has worked in building online communities in general.

### BUILDING A COMMUNITY

- **Choose a town or neighborhood with attributes conducive to success.** Make sure the community is ready for a site like this. Is it thriving? Is it hip? Is it tech-savvy? Are there hot community issues or stories that many people are already interested in? Are there people with strong political opinions (as reflected by Weblogs, postings on other Web sites, letters to the editor, etc.)?
- **Know the community.** Engage people in person and online: make small talk, delve into the community, via networking, and talk about each other's interests and hobbies. Experience the community first-hand by shopping, socializing and enjoying recreational activities in the area. Attend community festivals, events, meetings. Create familiarity and friendships and demonstrate a genuine interest in whatever issues are of concern to its residents. Own their interests. Ultimately we found it an amazing experience to integrate ourselves into the real-world community and foster another one online.
- **Conduct a community information census.** What are the hot issues? What are people excited about? Scan a local newspaper (even if it is not yours) to find issues that are simmering already. What organizations are largest and most active? What organizations are already sufficiently organized to keep an updated Web site, to send press releases to community papers, to hold events? Are there freelance writers in the area? Is there a photography group that uses digital cameras? The groups, individuals and issues you discover should form the core of your HLCM site at launch. **[See the Skokie information census in Appendix VII.]**
- **Find the community's existing Internet structure and build from it.** Livefromarlington.com was started from a city listserv. Is there an existing listserv in your community? Are there Internet cafes in the town? Are there any local bloggers, newsgroups or chat rooms? We discovered one of goskokie.com's best contributors by coming across her personal blog one day. There are people using the Web, people who actively chat, post in forums and use blogs. There are people who read the newspaper, yet do not feel adequate coverage is given to their community. There are people fired up who have a story to tell. They just need a place to congregate, and a little guidance.
- **To build a community, focus on individuals.** Visit groups and events in the community early and often – but try to sell the Web site to members of the group or other attendees at the meeting, rather than groups themselves. From our interviews and experience, community Web sites work when they take a bunch of individuals and galvanize them into a new community group. Existing community groups, from our



findings, do not come to the site to continue group activities. Community Web sites work because they create a *new* community for people to join.

- **Don't describe the site as a publication or journalism outlet.** For many people, the biggest challenge is explaining the concept of citizens' media and helping them understand what kind of content is useful or appropriate. Calling the content "journalism" or "articles" tends to inhibit average citizens from becoming contributors.
- **Focus on the public, not government institutions.** Skokie government officials were skeptical and sometimes antagonistic toward goskokie.com. Rather than involve the official voice of the community, talk with those who want one; for example, people who speak up at school board and town meetings. This site will work if it is a place for the people to air grievances, opinions, or just meet up.
- **Have a site moderator or administrator.** A person in this role is important:
  - a) To assure people in the community that the Web site will be moderated, or they become convinced it will be a haven for vulgar and defaming posts. This is not true – we had no problems in this area, and none of the other HLCM sites identified inappropriate posts as a significant issue. But you will never convince people of this; having a visible administrator conveys an appearance of law and order, no matter how unnecessary.
  - b) To work out the technical kinks of a site. Also, the site should evolve as people use it. A site administrator needs to revamp the site to best suit the community's user tendencies. It is possible to find someone in the community willing to do this, but you should not count on it.
  - c) To ensure the vision and commitment to interactivity needed to foster a community Web site. Turning a site over to a local institution may result in a static site, like the ones maintained by local governments, rather than a thriving, dynamic community. Every site we studied had a moderator who maintained the content, technical structure and integrity of the site. They did not all have journalistic backgrounds, but they shared a desire to create a dynamic forum for their community.

## DESIGN & FUNCTIONALITY

- **Design the site to be used, not just read.** An HLCM site is a tool to facilitate one-on-one or one-on-many communication between people. The content gives people something to talk about. Make it easy for users to connect with each other by using a variety of tools such as: commenting capability, chat, instant messaging, "e-mail to a friend" and a "who's online" indicator.
- **Use pictures and icons.** These break up the text and keep the site looking interesting.
- **Use technologies that keep the content looking fresh.** For instance, rotate user-contributed photos on the front page; change graphic appearance at different times of day

(“dayparting”), post the newest submissions to the front page; display lists of the newest content and newest user comments.

- **Give users the ability to customize the appearance and content of the site.**
- **Offer a variety of ways to gather and submit content.** Accept photos as well as text. Enable story submissions via email, telephones – or even instant messaging. The more you lower the barriers to posting, the more likely people will be to submit content.
- **Offer content areas that have individual proprietors as well as places for discussion and interaction.** Weblogs and columns provide an outlet for individuals who have things to say and want to publish periodically. They don’t tend to foster discussion and debate. Discussion forums are much better at generating interaction between people. The ideal site offers both types of publishing.

## CONTENT

- **Don’t limit the site to text.** Use all of the media available on the Web – including, images, sound and video. Multimedia features were among the most popular on goskokie.com.
- **Capitalize on hot issues.** It will be much easier to build a discussion around an issue that is already on people’s radar screens than to conjure one up from nothing. One of our most successful content submissions was about the controversy over a teacher’s firing.
- **Don’t use the site to publish content in news article form.** Content presented in traditional journalistic style tends not to generate traffic or reaction; hyperlinks and a conversational style are much more effective in helping create a sense of community.
- **Post content that will spread “virally.”** Profiles of people or businesses, for instance, will be publicized by the people who are interviewed. They’ll tell their friends and families and cause them to visit the site. This is part of the reason our Mother’s Day and Skokie business event coverage drew relatively heavy traffic.
- **There is untapped interest in “neighborhood news.”** Make contacts through institutions that connect to neighborhoods – for instance, neighborhood associations, PTA’s and local hangouts.
- **Strike a balance in the amount of editorial control to impose.** Too much will squelch citizen participation; too little will inhibit some people from taking part for fear of inappropriate content. We found that allowing instant posting, but with an “alert the administrator” button if content is objectionable, worked effectively during our project.

## MARKETING & OUTREACH

- **Be visible during the launch period.** Traditional advertising campaigns have value, but there is no substitute for meeting personally with key individuals and community groups.
- **Optimize your site for search engines.** Put key phrases (e.g., “Skokie news” and “Skokie photos”) in the HTML title of each page and near the top of the content area of those pages.
- **Make it easy for users to register and post.** Our most successful tactic in adding registered users was to attend events and have people sign up on the spot with an initial content post.

## REVENUE

- **Develop mechanisms for individuals and local businesses to place – and pay for – advertising.** The most obvious financial benefit of an HLCM site for a media company is the construction of a hyperlocal audience that can then be sold to hyperlocal advertisers. We found evidence that local advertisers were interested in an HLCM site. Some of the first postings on goskokie.com came from business owners promoting their business. Another early post came from an advertiser advertising herself; she was looking for a job and posted her resume on the site. Posts like these quickly led us to establish a "Business Promotions" section and a "Skokie Jobs" section. Since our site was a student project, we provided these sections for free. But the experience of other sites indicates people will pay.
- **Develop self-service ad-building and placement.** For what small hyperlocal businesses are able to pay to advertise, it won't be possible to support a large – maybe even any – ad sales staff. A self-service approach, a la Google's AdWords system, has great potential. We began working on an “ad-builder” tool but never implemented it. The tool would allow registered users to create their own advertisements -- for their businesses, themselves, events, or whatever it may be. Ad space could be sold through a bidding process – allowing the advertisers to establish the value. **[Our vision for how an ad-builder tool might work is contained in Appendix VIII.]**
- **Don't charge for access.** We found no evidence people would be willing to pay for an HLCM site.

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE PUBLIC

- **Launch an HLCM site yourself** if you perceive an information void in your community. We found successful HLCM sites that sustained themselves on volunteer labor or a few hours of work each day by someone who cares about their community.

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR MEDIA COMPANIES

- **Associate an HLCCM site with a print publication if possible.** Print publications offer a vehicle for promoting an HLCCM site as well as a place to publish content submitted via the Web – providing an incentive for people to post content to the site. It also adds a significant revenue stream in the form of print advertising. If the publication has a good reputation already, the HLCCM site can benefit from being associated with it. The Northwestvoice.com experiment in Bakersfield, Calif., will be important to watch over the next year or two.
- **For a metropolitan newspaper, consider an HLCCM site a means to connect with – and learn about what’s going on in – towns and neighborhoods that are not consistently covered in print.** A community Web site is a means of expanding into the community. Citizens who read about the new site in their paper will naturally be drawn to it, because it affects their community and it is associated with a trusted source. The site does not necessarily need to be branded as belonging to the paper. But an association with the paper can provide trust, legitimacy and security – not to mention a built-in capability for selling advertising. In addition, staff familiar with the community can have a role in running the project.

## XI. About the Authors

This report was researched and written by six students pursuing their master's degree in new media at the Medill School of Journalism, Northwestern University. Here they are:

	<p><b>Leah Gliniewicz</b>  <b>B.S., Broadcast Journalism, Florida International University, 1996</b>          Leah grew up in Pennsylvania. She spent the last several years in South Florida working as reporter, copy editor, board operator for an NPR affiliate station, and an online editor and producer. Leah will graduate from Medill in September 2004. She plans to continue working in new media journalism. She can be reached at <a href="mailto:wpbleah@yahoo.com">wpbleah@yahoo.com</a>.</p>
	<p><b>Sara Ocegueda</b>  <b>B.A., English and political science, Georgia State University, 1999</b>          Sara hails from Atlanta, where she worked after college in an administrative and web design capacity. She will graduate from Medill in early 2005. An avid blogger, Sara is fluent in Spanish and conversational in French. She can be reached at <a href="mailto:michiru_y2k@yahoo.com">michiru_y2k@yahoo.com</a>.</p>
	<p><b>Gina Petrelli</b>  <b>B.A., English and linguistics, University of Texas, 2000</b>          Gina is a Texan, born and bred. After graduating from UT Austin, she moved to a small village in Spain to teach English. She then worked for Texas Monthly magazine as new media coordinator with responsibilities including HTML coding, editing content and creating advertorial sections. Gina's dream would be working as an online and print copy editor and teaching at a college. Gina will graduate from Medill in September 2004. She can be reached at <a href="mailto:gigi_p25@hotmail.com">gigi_p25@hotmail.com</a>.</p>
	<p><b>Vivek Shankar</b>  <b>B.S., Mathematics, St. Xavier's College. Bombay, India, 2000</b>          Inspired by the Tintin comics first read to him by his parents, Vivek decided to pursue a career in journalism after college. After three years at ZDNet India, like the protagonist in "Tintin in America", Vivek headed west to what was once Al Capone's town. His racket: the intersection of journalism and technology. After goskokie.com, Vivek sharpened his journalism chops at Bloomberg News. He will graduate from Medill in December 2004. He can be reached at <a href="mailto:vshankar@gmail.com">vshankar@gmail.com</a>.</p>
	<p><b>Mike Tumolillo</b>  <b>B.A., English, University of Oklahoma, 1998</b>          Mike has lived in many places, the most recent being Albuquerque, New Mexico. There he built Web sites, wrote, shot a short movie and began learning Macromedia Flash. At Medill, he interviewed cops, studied stocks, and refined his writing and Flash skills. In a perfect world, Mike would write long features and create multimedia documentaries. Mike will graduate from Medill in September 2004. He can be reached via <a href="http://www.miketumo.com">www.miketumo.com</a> or <a href="mailto:mike@miketumo.com">mike@miketumo.com</a>.</p>
	<p><b>Jason Tuohey</b>  <b>B.A., English, University of Massachusetts, 1999</b>          Jason hails from Boston, where he began his career as a technical writer. After composing online help systems, Web sites and technical manuals for General Electric and Cisco Systems. In addition to the goskokie.com project at Medill, Jason has reported on environmental issues in Chicago. He hopes to blend the traditional ideals of journalism with Internet technology for a progressive, media Web site. He will graduate in December 2004. He can be reached at <a href="mailto:j_tuohey@yahoo.com">j_tuohey@yahoo.com</a>.</p>

## APPENDIX I. BLUEPRINT FOR STARTING AN HYPERLOCAL CITIZENS MEDIA SITE

This section reflects a mix of activities we actually conducted and those we wish we had -- or would have if given more time.

### STARTUP

- Research community – find draws, attractions unique to the area
  - For example, Skokie’s Village Inn pizzeria is a big weekend hangout. Pat’s Diner has been a community icon for more than 20 years
- Find key organizations and community groups and try to associate or incorporate the site with it as a networking & communication tool in between meetings
- Survey the community – or find existing data that gives you “pulse/state of community”
- Seed site content prior to launch
  - Restaurant reviews, directory
  - Business directory or yellow pages partner
  - Sports schedule, team roster
  - School board/town council meeting minutes
  - Crime statistics, sex offender database, health inspection reports
  - MP3s from local bands
- Mine local papers to find possible site contributors -- community “talking heads” or those who know a lot about community issues

### ROLE OF STAFF

- Seed super-local content
- Be community cheerleader, proselytizer, facilitator, editor and moderator
- Create reward program for those who post

### GROUP BLITZ ON ANYTOWN USA

- Host meet-ups, walk people through of site and to recruit content contributors
  - Contact residents who already have blogs
  - Offer tutorials about how to blog/write a news story
- Build familiarity
- Meet with key community organizations/clubs – troll for trusted contributors
- Try a trade with groups, giving free promotion on the blog if you contribute content
- Attend a popular town event (such as arts festival or sporting event) and promote. Consider sponsoring it to create buzz.

- Place ads in local media around the time of blitz
- Create a CD/tutorial
  - Can hand out at events, and/or link from site
  - Can have added features such as samples from web site, columns from contributors

#### BUILD COMFORT LEVEL WITH FAMILIAR TOOLS

- Make posting easy via alternative means – e-mail, SMS texting on cellphone, submit photos on cellphone, audioblog from any telephone
- Instant messaging, chat rooms – real-time communication

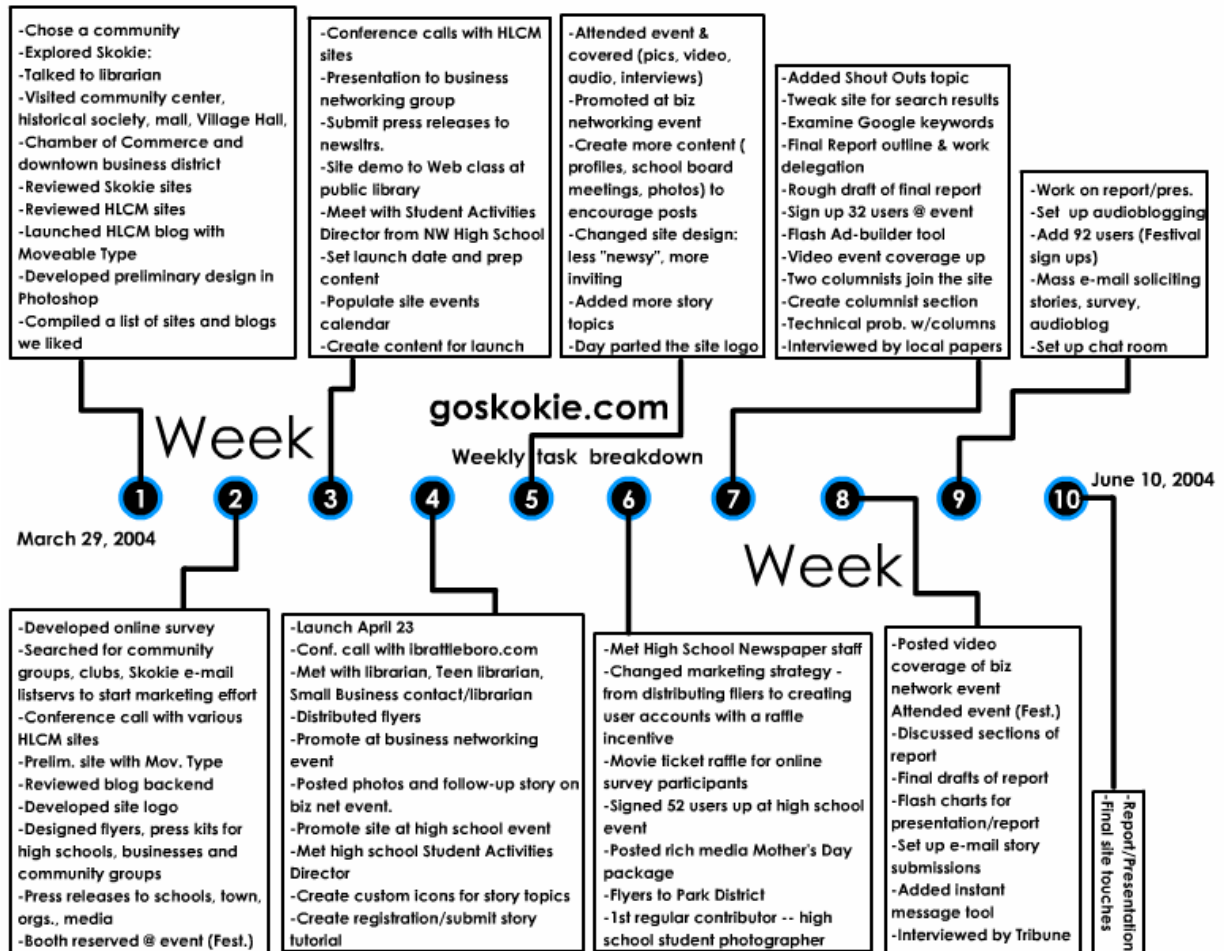
#### OTHER FEATURES

- Extend the Web site content into a print product – opportunity for cross-promotion and selling ads
  - OR Make the site a spin-off of an existing area suburban newspaper in the area
    - Built-in reputation, brand and recognition
    - Local print reporters can help generate initial content
- Have a companion e-mail newsletter that sends out headlines and latest posts or comments. This has ad revenue potential (by selling ads in e-mail)
- Add personalization features – blog skins, users can organize content based on preference (i.e. sports topic on homepage), icons to go with users' login names (a la FredTalk)

#### ADVERTISING/MARKETING POTENTIAL

- HLCM ads can be an alternative to higher-priced local print media
- Advertisers could have their own advertorial blogs or "Ask the Expert" blogs
- Buy Google keywords as a means to target local people searching for news specific to that community

## APPENDIX II. PROJECT TIMELINE





### APPENDIX III. OTHER HLCCM SITES

<b>iBrattleboro.com</b>	
<b>Launch</b>	A little more than one year ago.
<b>About the community</b>	Brattleboro, Vermont, has a population of about 12,000. The area is politically active and tends to be liberal.
<b>About the site</b>	<p>ibrattleboro.com was launched by Chris Grotke and Lise LePage, who run Muse Arts Inc., a web development company in Brattleboro. Grotke said the site came about because Muse Arts had difficulty getting press coverage in the local newspaper.</p> <p>ibrattleboro.com dubs itself as a continually published local news source by and for the people of Brattleboro. The site encourages Web visitors to get involved in what they call 'an experiment in citizen journalism' by submitting news, events, stories, reviews, how-to's, recipes, places to go, things to do, or anything else, or to drop by to see what others have contributed.</p>
<b>Who can post</b>	All the site content comes from the public. The site does not have reporters. Grotke and LePage manage the site and chime in with their own contributions. But they consider themselves part of the public when they post (except for the occasional "official sounding message" from ibrattleboro.com).
<b>What approval is required</b>	ibrattleboro.com requires administrative approval before submitted stories are published to the web site. Grotke and LePage read everything and leave everything just about as-is, but delete comments that are personal attacks.
<b>Content screening</b>	<p>The site content is pre-screened and pre-edited, but Grotke realizes that contributors expect their posts to go up in a reasonable amount of time. He said that he and LePage talk stories over prior posting them. User comments get posted immediately, but offensive posts are deleted. A majority of the time, Grotke and LePage mostly tweak the format of user postings — cleaning up text spacing and make it readable on the web (such as add in paragraph breaks). They leave the fact-checking to the readers (and the media who visit the site for possible story leads).</p> <p>Registered users get more benefit of the doubt when it comes to being edited, but the site administrators say they are not heavy-handed.</p>

	<p>"It's a reflection on the community – people are speaking/writing on the site the same way they do in town. If it offends you, then don't come to the site," Grotke said.</p> <p>The duo posts about 1,200 stories per year overall. The topics with the largest amount of postings are Activism, Opinion, Questions/Comments, Politics and Town News. Grotke said there are a lot of creative discussions on the site among users about how the town can be improved. This year, Grotke began announcing field trips for site users to meet other users, and added that new friends have been made.</p>																																																																
<p><b>Business model</b></p>	<p>Their first priority is to serve the community, but Grotke hopes the site will cover its costs as well. He would like to hire a few reporters, an editor and an ad salesperson. He said the main goal of ibrattleboro.com is to serve the community and to be an independent media source that anyone can contribute to.</p>																																																																
<p><b>Advertising</b></p>	<p>ibrattleboro.com offers free directory listings to all local businesses and organizations in its Local Links section. Other opportunities offered to businesses include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using a business name as a user name on the site;</li> <li>• Submitting stories of interest to customers</li> <li>• Promoting events on the site's calendar</li> <li>• Users becoming a member and making his/her</li> </ul> <p>ibrattleboro.com also offers targeted advertising in more than 20 sections and the homepage.</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="472 1266 1386 1486"> <thead> <tr> <th>AD TYPE</th> <th>AD SIZE IN PIXELS</th> <th>SET UP FEE</th> <th>1 WEEK</th> <th>1 MONTH</th> <th>3 MOS</th> <th>6 MOS</th> <th>12 MOS</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>SMALL BADGE STYLE</td> <td>180*90</td> <td>\$30</td> <td>\$20</td> <td>\$65</td> <td>\$175</td> <td>\$332</td> <td>\$624</td> </tr> <tr> <td>MEDIUM BLOCK STYLE</td> <td>180*180</td> <td>\$60</td> <td>\$40</td> <td>\$130</td> <td>\$351</td> <td>\$663</td> <td>\$1,248</td> </tr> <tr> <td>LARGE COLUMN STYLE</td> <td>180*360</td> <td>\$120</td> <td>\$80</td> <td>\$250</td> <td>\$675</td> <td>\$1,275</td> <td>\$2,400</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="8"><b>HOME PAGE ADS</b></td> </tr> <tr> <td>SMALL BADGE STYLE</td> <td>180*90</td> <td>\$30</td> <td>\$30</td> <td>\$95</td> <td>\$256</td> <td>\$484</td> <td>\$912</td> </tr> <tr> <td>MEDIUM BLOCK STYLE</td> <td>180*180</td> <td>\$60</td> <td>\$60</td> <td>\$190</td> <td>\$513</td> <td>\$969</td> <td>\$1,824</td> </tr> <tr> <td>LARGE COLUMN STYLE</td> <td>180*360</td> <td>\$120</td> <td>\$120</td> <td>\$380</td> <td>\$1,026</td> <td>\$1,938</td> <td>\$3,648</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>*Setup fee waived for first-time customers.</p>	AD TYPE	AD SIZE IN PIXELS	SET UP FEE	1 WEEK	1 MONTH	3 MOS	6 MOS	12 MOS	SMALL BADGE STYLE	180*90	\$30	\$20	\$65	\$175	\$332	\$624	MEDIUM BLOCK STYLE	180*180	\$60	\$40	\$130	\$351	\$663	\$1,248	LARGE COLUMN STYLE	180*360	\$120	\$80	\$250	\$675	\$1,275	\$2,400	<b>HOME PAGE ADS</b>								SMALL BADGE STYLE	180*90	\$30	\$30	\$95	\$256	\$484	\$912	MEDIUM BLOCK STYLE	180*180	\$60	\$60	\$190	\$513	\$969	\$1,824	LARGE COLUMN STYLE	180*360	\$120	\$120	\$380	\$1,026	\$1,938	\$3,648
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<p><b>Staff/content contributors</b></p>	<p>A slow day is one hour per day and a busy day is three to four hours per day. Each morning, Grotke logs on and processes any stories, events, and links that were submitted the night before. He repeats this process two more times throughout the day, so content is added to the site about three times per day. Reading takes the most time; it is one reason he and LePage decided to build the site slowly.</p> <p>Grotke hopes to work with local college students to build out extra features on ibrattleboro.com. Grotke talked with</p>																																																																

	high school English teachers in an effort to get students to post on the site. He has also talked with student alumni groups about posting. "The more local the site, the better," Grotke said.
<b>Free classifieds</b>	No.
<b>Users/traffic</b>	ibrattleboro.com has 262 registered users. The site was averaging roughly three posts per day, but that number has increased, Grotke said. The site gets one to two new members each week. The contributors include a sizable number of 30-40-year-olds and 40-65-year-olds. There are a few users older than 65, but the bulk of site users range from 30- to 50-years-old.
<b>Tech platform</b>	Geeklog
<b>Marketing</b>	<p>At first, ibrattleboro.com used word-of-mouth, telling everyone they knew. Then they put up fliers around town. They also made brief presentations at community meetings.</p> <p>Grotke said for a long time they had difficulty describing their site to people. They told people that it was a site in which anyone could be a reporter. But he added that after reading about ohmynews.com six months after ibrattleboro.com was launched, they started calling their site format 'citizen journalism.'</p> <p>The local newspaper wrote a story about ibrattleboro.com and so did the local National Public Radio affiliate. Grotke also made business cards with the URL and logo and distributed them.</p>
<b>Content</b>	<p>Grotke and LePage came up with ibrattleboro.com topics by making a list of the most heavily talked about items by townspeople. Obituaries and pet topics were added because users requested them.</p> <p>The first official group to post content was the library, which posted events. (Although ibrattleboro.com is not allowed to be accessed through the Internet browsers at the library.)</p> <p>Grotke said one of the hardest things to explain/communicate to people is what a story is. He told people that they had to write a substantial story in order</p>

	<p>for it to run on the homepage. "We'd love to give classes on what a news story is and how to write one," Grotke said.</p> <p>Building ibrattleboro.com slowly allowed Grotke and LePage to build up a group of long-time users. The people who use the site are a lot more valuable if and whether there is some sort of flame war because the regular users will step in and keep things civil, Grotke said.</p> <p>In terms of seeding content Grotke recommended: interviewing well-known in the community, getting content on the site that people will talk about, and having content on the site to get users to come back was helpful.</p> <p>Impressively, the site broke news and beat the local newspaper in a story about the firing of the editor at that particular local newspaper. Grotke said they had it on their site by 1 p.m. and the paper did not cover the story.</p>
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<b>WestportNow.com</b>	
<b>Launch</b>	March 2003
<b>About the community</b>	Westport, Conn., is a suburban community of 26,000 about 50 miles northeast of New York City. Westport is a savvy, upper-middle class community of highly motivated, intelligent people (Fortune 500 CEOs, high-profile media personalities) – and “a lot of type-A personalities,” said Gordon F. Joseloff WestportNow.com’s founder, publisher and editor.
<b>About the site</b>	<p>WestportNow.com was founded by Joseloff, a long-time journalist with United Press International and CBS News. He also heads the town’s 36-member legislative body called the Representative Town Meeting (RTM). He describes Westport as a vibrant community that is served by two non-daily newspapers.</p> <p>Joseloff built WestportNow.com because he saw a need for an in-town news site that is underserved by the print media with such an active community of many broadband users. He said reporters who cover Westport can not afford to live there, and the papers do not have the resources to cover the town for stories other than town council meetings. He also wanted to experiment with online journalism.</p>
<b>Who can post</b>	Anyone can post comments directly to the site. But all stories must be submitted to Joseloff prior to appearing on the site. There is no section on WestportNow.com for users to submit stories/news tips. Users either e-mail items or call Joseloff directly.
<b>What approval is required</b>	Joseloff reads and edits postings to professional standards.
<b>Content screening</b>	<p>WestportNow.com is a professionally edited news site. Joseloff does nearly all the editing of the site’s content. He calls it a “filtering process” in which all the content is channeled through him. “I do not feel compelled to post everything,” he said. He also has a plug-in that sweeps the site for profanity and spam.</p> <p>WestportNow.com is perceived as fair and professional, Joseloff said. He is careful not to push any agenda or to editorialize. Because he heads the RTM, he does not write stories about the town meetings in which he participates. He also offers a subscriber-based daily e-</p>

	mail service, which includes a headline and blurb for stories posted on the site.
<b>Business model</b>	Joseloff said the cost of running WestportNow.com is so small and he does not need a lot of resources. People contribute stories and spread the word. He is worried about spending money on promotional items.
<b>Advertising</b>	<p>The site generates revenue through advertising: Graphic ads on the left or right side of the "home page" (all other pages are bundled at no additional cost for first-time advertiser) are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- \$150 for one month</li> <li>- \$400 for three months</li> <li>- \$700 for six months</li> <li>- \$900 for nine months</li> <li>- \$1,000 for one year</li> </ul> <p>The top banner ad is sold at a negotiable rate (\$500 per month if it's the only ad; less if it rotates with other advertisers). There is an additional charge if the ad is more than 90 pixels high (negotiable).</p> <p>Advertisers can also buy a text link through MarketBanker at \$25 for a week or \$75 per month, or a text/graphic ad through BlogAds at or \$35 a week or \$125 a month. Other national graphic ads are via Commission Junction (<a href="http://www.cj.com">www.cj.com</a>) and LinkShare (<a href="http://www.linkshare.com">www.linkshare.com</a>) whereon WestportNow.com gets paid a percentage of sales.</p>
<b>Staff/content contributors</b>	<p>WestportNow.com has a handful of regular "pseudo-journalists," who write columns and shoot pictures. They e-mail Joseloff two to three sentence blurbs on topics such as a school basketball game. Joseloff writes a longer version of the story. He said these contributors are experienced in writing and broadcast. He pays them with mugs, T-shirts and photo credits for now, but hopes to pay them in the future. He does not give attribution to the contributor unless it is a column, although readers get a credit for submitting news tips. The community has become progressively more involved with contributing site content.</p> <p>Depending on the day's news flow, Joseloff spends</p>

	about three to five hours per day working on the site.
<b>Free classifieds</b>	Yes, for all registered users.
<b>Users/traffic</b>	WestportNow.com averages 2,000 page views per month.
<b>Tech platform</b>	Movable Type
<b>Marketing</b>	<p>Joseloff hopes to involve much more of the community, but said it has been slow so far. Site advertising has largely been by word-of-mouth. He has purchased Google keywords, but added that it is expensive for WestportNow.com, but may not be for a bigger company such as the Tribune Co.</p> <p>He plans to launch a direct mailing and purchase transit advertising at train and bus stops. He is holding off on the direct mailing because he is worried about spending money until he can get interns to help with editing. Some of his stories such as those related to Martha Stewart have been picked up by Google News.</p>
<b>Content</b>	<p>Daily site postings include anything from a calendar of events, news from schools, obituaries, weather, or a photo with a caption. Joseloff said photos are a popular feature on the site. He does Google searches to find out what Westport residents are doing and items that are not in the local newspaper. "I've become an aggregator," he said.</p> <p>One user-contributed content example is Fran's Lists, a regular column on consumer issues.</p> <p>Joseloff received a news tip via cell phone about a school bus driver who was intoxicated and driving. He said it was not in the local newspaper because it does not have the resources.</p> <p>Joseloff would like the site to evolve into a hybrid with content from wire services, broadcast and some traditional journalism writing.</p>

<b>NorthwestVoice.com</b>	
<b>Launch</b>	May 2004
<b>About the community</b>	<p>Northwestvoice.com serves a community of about 50,000 people (22,000 homes) in northwest Bakersfield, Calif. The community is about two hours from Los Angeles, and has a significantly lower cost of living than L.A. The city's economy centers on the agriculture and oil industries.</p> <p>Bakersfield has 40 percent broadband penetration and a familiarity and comfort level with e-mail, blogging, etc.</p>
<b>About the site</b>	<p>Northwestvoice.com is a Web site relying on content submitted by members of the community, with a weekly (free) print section distributed to all northwest Bakersfield households and also newsracks in the area. One article in each print edition is written by the editor of the Voice; the remainder of the content is harvested from the Web site.</p> <p>Information about the project can be found at <a href="http://www.opensourcejournalism.org">http://www.opensourcejournalism.org</a></p>
<b>Who can post</b>	<p>Anyone can post provided that content (events, pictures, stories) is relevant to Bakersfield. The site distinguishes between occasional and "trusted contributors."</p> <p>Registration is required to read content on the Web site. (You get a few pages as freebies/teasers before being asked to register.)</p>
<b>What approval is required</b>	<p>News about government, land development and other "highly official" issues is written by journalists—not the community. A Northwest Voice editor reviews submissions before publishing to the site. Contributors receive an e-mail letting them know when their submission has been posted.</p>
<b>Content screening</b>	<p>Occasional contributors may have their work touched up for spelling and grammar fixes, but otherwise retain their voice.</p> <p>Regular, trusted contributors are not subject to screening.</p>
<b>Business model</b>	Advertiser-supported, with ads sold in a print/online



	<p>package. As of late April, northwestvoice.com had 19 committed advertisers.</p>
<b>Advertising</b>	<p>The site sales person collaborates with the advertisers to build ads. They have set up a “template” in Quark to create ads collaboratively with the advertiser.</p> <p>Online advertising could involve Google-style text ads for local advertisers to choose the sections in which ads appear.</p> <p>Advertiser blogs are another option. Their posts would appear in the live site, and the publishing software does come with that capability.</p>
<b>Staff/content contributors</b>	<p>The editor, originally from Bakersfield, is a 24-year-old recent journalism school graduate. She interned for The Bakersfield Californian and is skilled with community outreach. She realizes the difference between the role of an editor for a newspaper and an editor for a community news Web site.</p> <p>The editor’s role is to meet and encourage the community to submit content. She also contributes 10 percent of the content.</p> <p>Before launch, the Californian lined up a strong roster of “trusted contributors” – pastors, coordinators of youth sports leagues, leaders of community groups, etc.</p>
<b>Free classifieds</b>	No.
<b>Tech platform</b>	A customized content management system based on iUpload – integrated with print and Web publishing tools.
<b>Marketing</b>	<p>The Californian’s main marketing tactic was to let the community do the marketing. They targeted existing community organizations such as schools, government, religious institutions, festivals and events.</p> <p>Northwestvoice.com also promoted the site in the Californian print and Web publications.</p>
<b>Content</b>	<p>As of July 2004, 36 percent of the content is photographs, while 13 percent is school news, 11 percent is community events, 7 percent is youth sports and 2 percent is church news. Ten percent of coverage is columns written by locals selected by publisher Mary Lou Fulton for their expertise on things like horses, cars, schools and outdoor life.</p>

<b>FredTalk (fredtalk.fredericksburg.com)</b>	
<b>Launch</b>	<p>FredTalk is a discussion board area (forum) on the Fredericksburg.com Web site. It is therefore very different than the other (Weblog-based) sites we reviewed. It is also the most successful of the six in attracting users.</p> <p>Fredericksburg.com initially experimented with forums around 2000, but the project was a failure and they were soon taken down.</p> <p>“It wasn’t terribly successful at that time,” Fredericksburg.com editor Chris Muldrow said. “I don’t think people were very comfortable with using the system.”</p> <p>Around 2002, site leaders decided it was time to give forums another try, and the current iteration of FredTalk was born.</p>
<b>About the community</b>	<p>Fredericksburg, Va., is about 50 miles south of Washington D.C., and about 50 miles north of Richmond, the state’s capital. The city has fewer than 20,000 residents but is surrounded by rapidly growing suburban communities growing because of proximity to Washington.</p>
<b>About the site</b>	<p>Fredericksburg.com is the online business for the local paper, the <i>Free Lance-Star</i>. The Free Lance-Star publishing company also owns three radio stations.</p> <p>Initially, user response to FredTalk was slow. It took a double-homicide investigation involving Mary Walsh, a former Fredericksburg resident, to drive traffic to the forums. Spurred by this major news event, people began coming to FredTalk in droves to discuss the case and share information.</p> <p>Many users continued to use the forums after the Walsh case died down to discuss local issues, hobbies, sports and whatever other particular interests they had.</p>
<b>Who can post</b>	<p>Anyone can sign up as a registered user and post on FredTalk.</p>
<b>What approval is required</b>	<p>No approval is required for registered users.</p>

<b>Content screening</b>	<p>FredTalk uses a reactive policy toward moderating. They accept that most content should be posted, because the site leadership doesn't want to diminish the content of discussions.</p> <p>"We realize our users are driving this thing," Fredericksburg.com manager Bill Blevins said.</p> <p>The site has an alert button to report objectionable posts, a rules section. Site leaders say users generally police themselves.</p>
<b>Business model</b>	Advertiser-supported.
<b>Advertising</b>	Fredericksburg.com sells banner ads throughout its site. On May 1, the company launched a Star Business Directory, a print and online yellow pages service.
<b>Staff/content contributors</b>	All content is created by users. Site leaders say they have learned that efforts by staff members to generate discussion are often "thread killers."
<b>Free classifieds</b>	No, but the site offers a "swap" section where people can offer to trade merchandise for other merchandise.
<b>Users/traffic</b>	As of May 2004, FredTalk had 6200 registered users. The site attracts 800-1,000 unique users per week.
<b>Tech platform</b>	UBB.threads (Ultimate Bulletin Board) – infopop.com

<b>LivefromArlington.com</b>	
<b>Launch</b>	March 31, 2004
<b>About the community</b>	Arlington, Mass. Is home to about 42,000 people. David Coletta, who launched the site, said 40 percent of its residents tend to work in a high-tech profession.
<b>About the site</b>	<p>Coletta, a software engineer, runs the site along with volunteers. He has run a town listserv for the past four years, with 1,200 subscribers. Those who use the Listserv are enthusiastic participants driving about 50 to 100 plus e-mail messages per day.</p> <p>"Having the listserv already in place is pretty important to the site's success," Coletta said.</p> <p>Coletta wanted to create the site to make available the listserv information to people who did not receive the e-mails.</p> <p>"It's really a kind of electronic backyard fence for many people in this town," Coletta said.</p> <p>Driving traffic to the site is as easy as posting links on the listserv, Coletta said. For example, he puts polls on the site and teases to them with a link in the listserv e-mails.</p>
<b>What approval is required</b>	<p>Profanity has not been a problem on the site, according to Coletta. Geeklog, the database they used, has a profanity filter which will automatically replace a word on a filter list with "**deleted.*" This system has its flaws, he said.</p> <p>"Someone submitted a story about a bird-watching event called a 'Woodcock walk', referring to a Bird called a Woodcock. The software changed this to 'Wood*deleted*' everywhere that word appeared."</p>
<b>Content screening</b>	Not required; users must be 18 or older (although there is no way to control this).
<b>Business model</b>	At this point, Coletta can run the site without revenue. If he does exceed his server account quota, he will have to find a way to make money from the site to support it.
<b>Staff/content contributors</b>	Coletta initially recruited a staff of six volunteers. He asked each one to take one day of the week and post any interesting information that was sent through the

	<p>Arlington listserv. The seven of them were assigned a day to post stories, which ensured new daily content. Each volunteer may also choose, on their day (or any other day) to go out and find news that they think is worth putting on the site.</p> <p>A handful of other people in the community post about their areas of expertise.</p> <p>“One guy who rollerblades to work on the bike trail that passes through town is reporting traffic and road conditions on the trail. One woman is posting environmentally-related events. And someone from the town's Budget Review Task Force who takes notes at every meeting has been posting her notes on the site,” Coletta said.</p>
<b>Free classifieds</b>	Currently, no classifieds exist.
<b>Users/traffic</b>	LivefromArlington.com’s 220 users subscribed to the site from the listserv.
<b>Tech platform</b>	Geeklog

<b>Masslive.com Weblogs and forums</b>	
<b>Launch</b>	Masslive.com Weblogs (there are now 7, each covering a particular community) were launched August 2003. Forums have been running for several years and have attracted substantial usage.
<b>About the community</b>	Northampton, Mass., has a population of 30,000. It is an artsy community, with a large gay population.
<b>About the site</b>	<p>MassLive.com is about seven years old and is part of Advance.Net. Advance.Net president Jeff Jarvis stressed the importance of community interaction, which led the site to launch Weblogs.</p> <p>Masslive.com is the Web site for The Republican newspaper, which has a circulation of 18,000. The forums and blogs are a subcategory on the site, so they draw visitors from the paper and the Masslive.com site.</p>
<b>Who can post</b>	Any registered user can post to forums. Masslive recruits local bloggers.
<b>What approval is required</b>	Forum posting should be identifiable/ connected to a verifiable email to keep people accountable.
<b>Content screening</b>	Masslive.com relies on users to let them know about objectionable posts. Staff at the Advance.Net responds to electronically submitted complaints.
<b>Business model</b>	Advertising supported
<b>Advertising</b>	Banner ads from Masslive.com
<b>Staff/content contributors</b>	The Advance.net staff approached bloggers and people with a heavy presence in forums — people who wrote articulate posts (the majority of these people agreed to contribute). At first, the contributors were unpaid — now they get \$50 to contribute. Their youngest writer is 22 and their oldest in about 50 and is a retired professor. As far as training goes, some people get ongoing tutorials, others get a crash course as they are recruited.
<b>Tech platform</b>	Proprietary

## APPENDIX IV. INTERACTION TOOLS IMPLEMENTED AND CONSIDERED

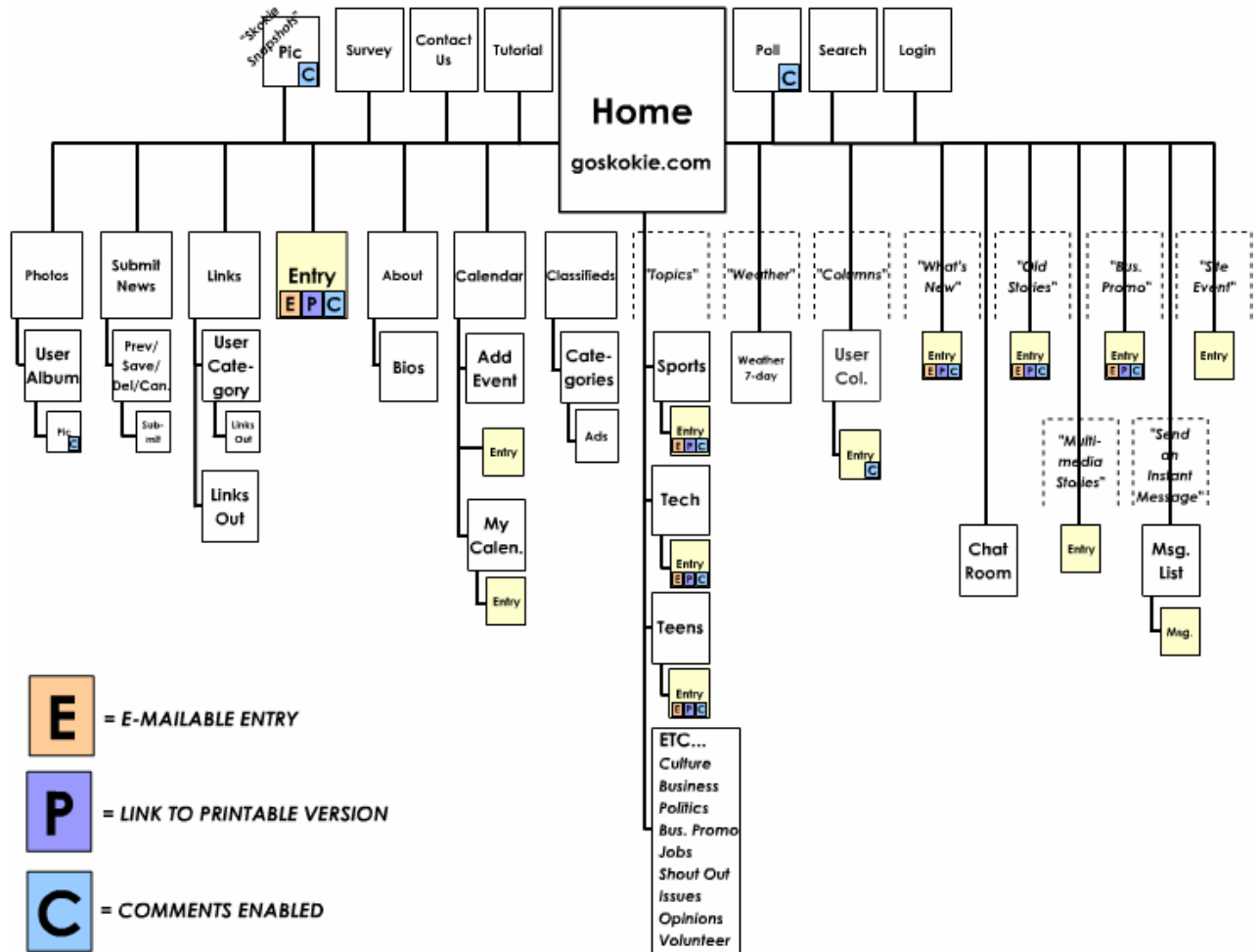
Connection Tool	Description (Implemented at launch)	Significance to Journalists	Significance to Community
<b>On-site story submissions</b>	User writes story into an on-site form.	Main way for users to get their knowledge -- and leads useful to journalists -- published	Way to show off writing, develop following, keep others "in the know."
<b>One-click print version of story</b>	Stories presented in a printer-friendly format. For HLCM, simplicity of layout wins over style/attitude.	Offers secondhand reach of readers who won't read a screen or won't visit the site (if other users print up copies).	A way to bring the site's digital info into the real world -- and connect to people not using the site.
<b>Story commenting</b>	Users can post comments about nearly every site entry.	Offers feedback within the framework of a specific story.	Focused, topic-oriented way to communicate with other users.
<b>E-mail a story to anyone</b>	One click and a user can send info on the site to anyone with an e-mail address from within the site.	Stories spread quickly = more feedback & recognition faster.	Users can boost their own social capital by sharing info with others. Way to initiate discussion (and initiate connections).
<b>In-site e-mail</b>	Users can send an e-mail from within the site to other users.	One more way to receive feedback -- even if respondent lacks e-mail service.	One more way to connect -- even if lacking e-mail service.
<b>Image submissions / Image Galleries</b>	Users can instantly upload photos and photo galleries.	Photos could be used in articles; easy transfer of photos; leads.	Involves users who prefer images over text; quick way to initiate discussion.
<b>Who's Online</b>	A text box indicating what other users are currently viewing the site.	Instantly know if a valued contact is currently on the site.	Can find friends/contacts to communicate with via the site; important to initiating communication.

Connection Tool	Description (Implemented midway)	Significance to Journalists	Significance to Community
<b>Users personal blogs</b> (“user columns” with comments)	User can set up a private section within site.	Columns tend to offer more in-depth, well-thought info. Perspective on own stories.	Chance to explore a topic in-depth and write in-depth about important local issues -- and perhaps gain recognition.
Connection Tool	Description (Implemented toward end)	Significance to Journalists	Significance to Community
<b>Instant message</b>	<b>1 user</b> can instantly send message to <b>1 other user</b> at a time.	Well-suited for <b>private exchanges</b> to instantly solicit sensitive info, advice or leads.	Form 1-on-1 bonds with other users. A private “line” of communication.
<b>Chat rooms</b>	<b>Multiple users</b> can exchange instant messages within a single “room” (dynamic display box within the site listing all of the users’ messages).	Excellent way to have a <b>group discussion</b> and solicit <b>instant</b> feedback and/or leads. Private conversations possible as well.	Great way to connect with numerous other users <b>instantly, simultaneously.</b>
<b>Phone-in audio submissions</b>	Users can call in and record messages later posted to site by Editor as links to .mp3 files. (See <a href="http://www.audblog.com">www.audblog.com</a> .)	Excellent way to obtain real-time leads from people all over - - even if strangers and lacking an Internet connection.	Familiar technology may lower barriers to using the site. Non-writer types have avenue to the site.
<b>E-mail story submissions</b>	Users can send stories to site as an e-mail to <a href="mailto:news@goskokie.com">news@goskokie.com</a> .	1 more tool to acquire users' info on what's happening	Familiar tool may lower barriers to submitting stories.

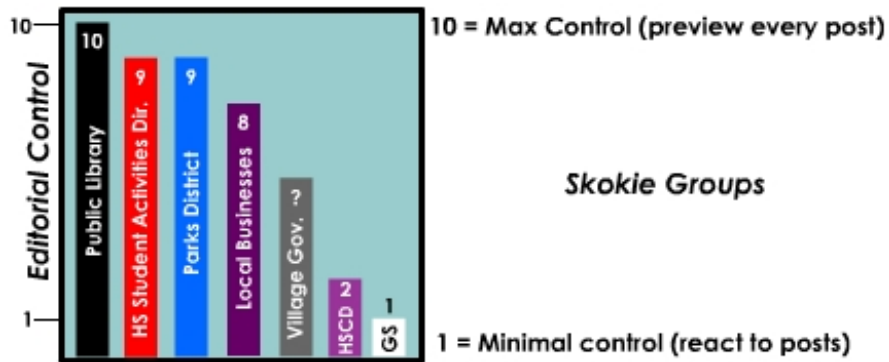


Connection Tool	Description (Not implemented)	Significance to Journalists	Significance to Community
Forums	A message board with replies able to be directed specific messages. <b>Not implemented because too similar to site's blog format.</b>	Discussions digress often, but good source of info on specific topics	Openness of the platform encourages people to contribute. Good way to find like-minded folks.
RSS Feeds	"Really Simple Syndication" - a way for sites to automatically display the most recent content of other sites. <b>Not implemented because we didn't have enough content on our end to supply an RSS Feed.</b>	Quickly see the latest news/info as reported by other sites.	Feeds can personalize or give a site character and an attractive level of timely info elsewhere. Way to connect with wider Web community.
Story "cart"	Users can remove/add a story from/to a dynamically populated cart of stories. (See "clippings" at <a href="http://www.iht.com">www.iht.com</a> for an example.) <b>Not implemented due to technical complexity.</b>	Quickly gather stories/leads of interest into one location.	A way to extract info from the site and organize it on the fly; makes the site more functional.
Story ranking (creating user ranking as well)	Users can vote on the quality of a story (e.g., 1=worst, 5=best). <b>Not implemented due to technical complexity.</b>	May help locate the higher-quality stories providing better info.	Motivation to write well. Good ranks equals good reputation, which equals gratifying recognition.
Mobile phone pictures	Users can snap photos and/or write messages with their cell phones and upload them to the site (see <a href="http://www.textamerica.com">www.textamerica.com</a> ). <b>Not implemented due to technical complexity.</b>	Similar to phone-in audio submissions, this allows people without access to the Internet to send in photos, increasing the reach of your "eyes and ears."	Non-writer types have avenue to connect to the site. Increases accessibility of the site.
Trackback	A quick way to tell another site that it is being referred to in a story on your site. A Web version of a footnote. <b>Not implemented due to technical complexity.</b>	Allows journalist to see how and where his/her story is being used.	A quick way to "link" a community together around a post.

# APPENDIX V. GOSKOKIE.COM SITE MAP



APPENDIX VI. EDITORIAL CONTROL PERSPECTIVES



ddd	Public Library (10)	The librarian was seriously concerned with a few offensive posts being associated with every member of the site. She wanted to approve every post.
ddd	High School Student Activities Director (9)	The director wanted students to post under his supervision; he preferred that they do it as part of study hall.
ddd	Parks District (9)	The Parks District wanted to use the site, but only after a thorough review of it. Despite the reactive editing style of goskokie.com, they were still interested in posting events.
ddd	Local Businesses (8)	Business owners were primarily concerned with criticism of their business -- but the promotional possibilities of the site won them over.
ddd	Village Government (?)	Village government officials were interested in the site, but when it came to posting information, the common refrain was: "I have enough to do." Their control preference was never established.
ddd	High School Student Committees Director (2)	The director formerly worked in PR and journalism. Offensive posts weren't a major concern; he was more interested in getting students to use the site.
	goskokie.com (1)	Skokie, IL (210 reg. users) It was important to give people the instant gratification of seeing their stories published to the site. Reactive editing only -- except for e-mailed stories.

## APPENDIX VII. COMMUNITY CONTENT CENSUS

Content	Source/Best place to Find	Ease of Acquisition (Easy, Medium, Difficult)	Value (Low, Medium, High)
Regular, user-generated stories	<p>The trick here is finding people who already want to write, rather than trying to convince people to write.</p> <p>Find bloggers -- who, being comfortable on the Web and with writing, are most likely to contribute regular content -- in Weblog directories, such as <a href="http://chicagobloggers.com">chicagobloggers.com</a>, <a href="http://ringsurf.com">ringsurf.com</a>, <a href="http://www.locussolus.com/chicago">www.locussolus.com/chicago</a> or a search using Google, Daypop, Blogdex, Technorati, etc.</p> <p>It is unlikely there will be many bloggers in a small community; nearby large cities may have bloggers who grew up in smaller surrounding community and want to write about it.</p> <p>Look to people who submit letters to the editor in local papers. Contact local clubs/groups centered on communicating/writing activities. For example, <a href="http://toastmasters.org">toastmasters.org</a> or local high school &amp; college creative writing/reporting classes; chambers of commerce (business owners immediately grasped the marketing advantages of the site).</p>	<p><b>Difficult</b>, but persuading bloggers to contribute is easier than persuading non-bloggers.</p>	<p><b>Highest</b> -- regular content can attract a regular audience, which is a source of new content suppliers. Regular content providers enable the site to run on its own. This is the basic tenet of an HLCM site.</p>
Videos	<p>Community residents; Public access television (see what locals are involved in producing these shows); <a href="http://www.accesschannel.com">www.accesschannel.com</a></p>	<p><b>Difficult</b> -- People use video cameras less than cameras. Video files are large and, if not well edited, unnecessarily long.</p>	<p><b>High</b> -- Video clips, if short and sweet, are like pictures on steroids; they attract a lot of interest.</p>

<b>Content</b>	<b>Source/Best place to Find</b>	<b>Ease of Acquisition (Easy, Medium, Difficult)</b>	<b>Value (Low, Medium, High)</b>
Pictures	Community residents; High school/college photojournalism classes	<b>Medium</b> -- People are more likely to submit easily snapped pictures than thought-out articles. But software enabling submission needs to be simple.	<b>High</b> -- Photos regularly draw page views.
High school sports schedules & scores	High school athletic departments; high school Web sites.	<b>Easy</b> except for scores, which must be reported or harvested from publications or Web sites.	<b>High</b>
Jobs	Local business owners (ideally, they would post the info on their own in a free or paid-for "Jobs" section). Local media outlets' Web sites. Local classifieds. Local residents hiring for temp work (for example, mowing lawns or baby sitting)	<b>Difficult</b> -- Accomplish by cannibalizing other pubs. (by linking to them), interviewing businesses or having business owners/residents post the info.	<b>High</b>
Personals	Community residents	<b>Medium</b> -- It would be simple to set up a personals section, but it would still require getting people to the site and aware of the section.	<b>High</b> -- The primary purpose of an HLCM site is to connect people to one another; romantic relationships are an obvious dimension of that.
Sales @ local shops	Give local business owners who have registered with the site a "business promotions" section and let them produce the info; otherwise, scan the local paper for the info in ads.	<b>Difficult</b> -- Some sales will inevitably be missed if owners are not providing the info.	<b>High</b> -- people love to find deals.

<b>Content</b>	<b>Source/Best place to Find</b>	<b>Ease of Acquisition (Easy, Medium, Difficult)</b>	<b>Value (Low, Medium, High)</b>
Restaurant reviews	Locals would be the best source if they're motivated to write; Otherwise, link to reviews (such as those by local papers) already on the Web.	<b>Difficult</b> for original reviews; easy for existing reviews, but many small restaurants will go unreviewed.	<b>High</b> -- People use Web sites to gather general entertainment information.
Art event calendars	Local performance venues ( <a href="http://www.centreeast.org/shows.htm">http://www.centreeast.org/shows.htm</a> ); high schools activity directors; local art galleries	<b>Easy</b> -- Event coordinators enjoy the free publicity and will often supply the info themselves - - if you can get them comfortable with the Web-based tools	<b>High</b> -- Entertainment information -- especially local entertainment info that goes ignored by larger media outlets -- needs a local announcement space.
Salaries of public employees	You can acquire this info through public records requests. Or a site like this <a href="http://www.thechampion.org">http://www.thechampion.org</a> may already exist in a community.	<b>Medium</b> -- Info is obtainable, but getting it may require ongoing attention.	<b>High</b> -- School salaries ignited conversation on <a href="http://gorskokie.com">gorskokie.com</a> .
Classifieds	Residents	<b>Easy</b> -- Set up a classifieds section.	<b>High</b> -- A convenient way for locals to sell & buy locally.
Celebrations/ Announcements	Residents; Hospitals (baby births); Churches (weddings);	<b>Medium</b> -- May need to acquire permission before posting info.	<b>High</b> -- People like to read about themselves & their neighbors.
Police Blotter	Village police department	<b>Medium</b> -- Available, but generally not in digital form.	<b>High</b> -- people like to know what crime is happening around them.
Restaurant inspection reports	Village Health Department	<b>Medium</b> -- Getting multiple reports can be bureaucratically challenging unless a database can be obtained; for fairness, must be kept up to date.	<b>Medium</b> -- More likely to be valuable in conjunction with a story about a particular venue

<b>Content</b>	<b>Source/Best place to Find</b>	<b>Ease of Acquisition (Easy, Medium, Difficult)</b>	<b>Value (Low, Medium, High)</b>
Music by local musicians	Local music venues to find ways to contact musicians; High school music program directors;	<b>Difficult</b> -- musicians may not have recordings; may be concerned with copyright	<b>Medium</b> -- adds an auditory dimension to site; people can connect with local arts scene
Contact information & profiles of village of government	www.skokie.org (or any local village Web site); Publications from local village hall	<b>Easy</b>	<b>Medium</b> -- Info is not in-depth, but useful to provide contact info

## APPENDIX VIII. AD-BUILDER TOOL

We were intrigued with the concept of a “self-service” ad-building tool that businesses could use to create and purchase advertising on an HLCM site. The profitability or feasibility of such a model is not yet determined, but how it might work is described below.

Users first input all of their business' information along with a message to their customers. They then upload an image and, if desired, create a coupon, such as, "10% off today only." Once the ad is complete, it can be saved for later modification, published to the business promotions section of the site, or published to an ad space if one is purchased by the user. The final version of the ad-builder would allow users to save their ad as a .jpg file or .pdf file as well – allowing them to use their ad in venues other than goskokie.com.

Below is page one of the unrefined ad-builder: Modify Info. This is where a user can input basic data about his or her business.

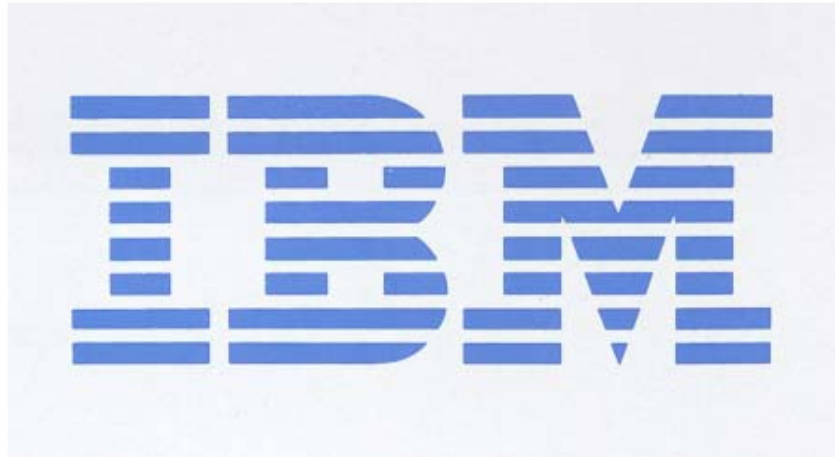
MikeTumolillo :: Today's Date: 5/28/2004

<b>Email</b>	<input type="text" value="mike@northwestern.edu"/>
<b>Business Name</b>	<input type="text" value="Mikes House Of Logos"/>
<b>Address</b>	<input type="text" value="123 N. Mike Street"/>
<b>City</b>	<input type="text" value="Chicago"/>
<b>State</b>	<input type="text" value="IL"/>
<b>Zip</b>	<input type="text" value="60601"/>
<b>Phone</b>	<input type="text" value="312-123-4567"/>
<b>Hours</b>	<input type="text" value="nine to five"/>
<b>Web Address</b>	<input type="text" value="http://www.mikesbigstore.com"/>
<b>Message</b>	<input type="text" value="Now what do you think?"/>

The ad-builder also has a logo page – where users can upload images to use in their ads.



MikeTumolillo :: Today's Date: 5/28/2004



[http://www.mondeca.com/english/logo\\_ibm.jpg](http://www.mondeca.com/english/logo_ibm.jpg)

use this

delete



[http://images.wri.org/logo\\_gm\\_large.jpg](http://images.wri.org/logo_gm_large.jpg)

Logos:  use this

delete

The ad-builder's coupon page allows users to add information about a current special their business may be offering.



MikeTumolillo :: Today's Date: 5/28/2004

**Coupon Message**

10% off everything today! Everything must go...

Preview

Update

Here is an image of how a final ad might look. Ideally, it will be ready to be published to goskokie.com and/or saved as a .jpg or .pdf to be printed.

Logo	Company	Phone
	Contact Name	
Coupon Deal	Address	
	City State ZIP	
	Hours open	
	Web site	
	Message	