

Teaching Mobile Journalism (MOJO)

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***And Syndicate Participants (below)**

MOJO Definition

This syndicate group spent much time on a definition, and, with some dissention, we agreed that we meant CELL PHONE JOURNALISM. This means journalism in which the reporting tool – for recording audio and video, writing material and transmitting it – is a mobile phone. It is probably most used for breaking news, such as sporting events, accidents or tragedies.

Many might add a BUBO to this definition, a gadget that fits around an iPhone and enables better film and sound to be recorded.

We decided not to consider backpack journalism, in which a reporter has a fairly substantial backpack and, therefore, a better video camera, etc.

The main implications of this change of kit are that it becomes:

1. much easier for the reporter to record video and audio without carrying around a bulky kit, and
2. it's much speedier to get the reporting onto the web

Most of this work is likely to be done in the future on SMART PHONES, that is iPhones, BlackBerrys and whatever else is being developed at the moment. However, for those with less smart phones, there are free apps that can be downloaded, which will enable one to shoot video, etc. For example, check out www.bambuser.com, www.qik.com, www.flixwagon.com and others.

It is important to note that there are many areas, not only in Africa, where coverage and equipment is not widespread enough for students to do this. However, it seems likely that the technology is spreading so quickly that areas that are at present not well served will soon be as well or better served than, say, the U.S. and Europe.

Technological Change

At the risk of stating the obvious, the group agreed that its session was a microcosm of the entire WJEC conference: Technology is changing so rapidly that it is hard to keep up with the changes to journalism and, therefore, journalism education.

Mobile or cell phone journalism has OPPORTUNITIES and DANGERS.

The **opportunities** include the instant transmission of video and film of Iran, Zimbabwe and elsewhere: getting facts about events out to the world accurately and quickly. Such actions have great implications for supporting democracy.

The **dangers** are linked with opportunities, and they are often the same ones that have existed ever since the internet became widespread. They include the problems of who is monitoring what goes onto the internet and how accurate it is. This is essentially the question of whether there are enough responsible gatekeepers. In the future, the traditional system we have experienced – reporter, news editor, sub-editor, etc. – may not apply.

Again, this point is a microcosm of the entire WJEC conference: Until recently, professional journalistic standards related to institutions – now we are detached from such standards. Fifteen years ago these institutions and their standards were the curators of the news, and now they are not.

There is a side issue of citizen journalism, but we did not discuss this in detail since we are still hoping to train students to work as professionals.

We agreed that fundamental skills are still all important: Technology is, after all, just a tool. Accordingly, most journalism teachers are likely to think that it is best to teach the basic journalistic skills of story-finding, researching and interviewing before embarking on mobile journalism.

Ethics

Some of the ethical dilemmas a journalist faces are multiplied in this sphere. Two of the main worries are recording people without their knowledge, (to do with the tools), and getting it onto the web (speed) before anyone has time to consider the implications of the story.

The plus, of course, is that you can publish and amend, adding context, removing material, etc., which might offend.

Should students transmit instantly to the web? There was plenty of dissent about this in the group. Several members allow students to get material onto blogs immediately.

Indeed, in some cases, this LIVE work was seen as essential to their training. Tutors then often hold critique sessions afterward, which include feedback such as how to edit and refine one's material.

Professional Work

Another point that ran through the entire conference was how to monetize this work. There were no easy answers to this question.

Techniques

When teaching MOJO journalism, small additions to basic reporting skills should be discussed.

For example, since sound is not great in cell-phone journalism, it is important for the reporter to get close to his subject. This shows a need for sophisticated people and interviewing skills, such as knowing how to talk to subjects beforehand to put them at ease.

Also, since the cell phone camera is not great, the reporter needs to keep it stable. And if he wants movement, he cannot pan – the subject has to come into the frame.

In addition, the reporter needs to ask questions slowly in order for the microphone to pick up sound. He needs to work in short bursts: interviews have to be in clips of about a minute. Since the bandwidth is limited, reporters cannot conduct 20-minute interviews. However, technology is moving so quickly that this is improving all the time.

Retraining Faculty

There may be a need to retrain tutors – in some cases students are coming into a classroom with higher abilities than their tutors.

Useful Links

www.coveritlive.com creates a page on your blog – you can send video, audio to it.
www.mojo-revolution.com – at the Winter Olympics students used iPhones with VeriCorder to produce material.

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