

ONLINE NEWSROOMS

In the 24-hour news environment, online newsrooms can provide up-to-the-minute information for reporters, bloggers, experts, researchers and others interested in a particular subject or story. Online newsrooms are also an invaluable resource for background material, story ideas, research and sources for anyone who is working on deadline.

With an online newsroom you can establish your organization as a source, provide an angle to a story, centralize information on a particular subject, increase the efficiency of your emails to reporters by providing links to your newsroom (instead of attachments) and attract traffic to your website.

Above all, the content of online newsrooms must be current and accurate. Visuals and graphics should be made easily available; they can be key to getting coverage in this multimedia world.

JUST THE FACTS

In a recent online survey, 93% of journalists say they use the Internet to find news sources.

According to the Arketi Group's 2007 Web Watch online survey of journalists,¹ 60% of journalists say they spend more than 20 hours a week on the Internet. When asked about how journalists use the Internet:

- 98% said reading news,
- 93% said finding news sources,
- 89% said finding story ideas,

- 67% said watching webinars or webcasts, and
- 59% said subscribing to RSS feeds, among other uses.

The most useful information on a website, according to this survey, is contact information (97%), search capabilities (95%), press room/press kits (92%), backgrounders (89%) and publication-quality graphics or photos (66%).

WHAT TO INCLUDE Provide up-to-date information and sources, as well as visuals and audio.

Breaking News

- If your online newsroom is part of a larger website, include hyperlinked newsroom headlines on the homepage and other pages of your website.
- In your online newsroom, feature news about your organization or issue by including a headline, summary or brief introductory paragraph about each headline, and links to more information (such as press releases, fact sheets, graphics, visuals and sources in your newsroom).
- Provide an RSS (Really Simple Syndication) subscription option in your online newsroom. Subscribers can then automatically receive press releases, action alerts and other regular information from your online newsroom.

Backgrounders, Fact Sheets, FAQs

- All content should be readable and to the point. Keep in mind that your audience might not know much about your issue.
- Shorter documents such as backgrounders and fact sheets should be made available as HTML text content that can be optimized for Internet search engines. This allows search engines such as Google to find your online newsroom information (which will promote traffic to your website), and users of your online newsroom will be able to quickly view information without having to download it. Add PDF files as a courtesy for those who wish to save or print larger documents, studies and reports.
- Calendars of events, archived releases and awards and recognitions can also be added.

Contacts and Sources

- Include up-to-date email addresses and phone numbers of all sources. Make sure these people are reachable by reporters.
- Add one or two lines describing their expertise and credibility.
- Provide a photo, links to articles they've authored or are quoted in, and a list of quotes from your experts.

- Include a description of your organization, along with the contact information for people designated to respond to media inquiries.

Visuals and Audio

- Downloadable photos, graphics, charts, maps and other visuals are key. Consider using free online image sharing services such as Flickr for posting your images and graphics. These visuals can then be embedded in a photo gallery or slide show in your online newsroom. Other popular image sharing websites include Picasa, Fotohacker, Webshots, SmugMug and Photobucket.
- If your video is an educational tool or you would like to provide a preview of available b-roll, consider hosting it on a video-sharing website such as YouTube or Vimeo and embed it in your website. This allows easy access and distribution.
- If b-roll is available, include information on its format (most journalists prefer miniDV or Beta) and who to contact to obtain a copy.
- Consider posting on your website recordings of audio clips with key quotes from your experts.

MAKING IT USER FRIENDLY

Think about the first-time user when designing and organizing your online newsroom.

Readability

- Online text is easier to read if surrounded by white space and in smaller type (no smaller than 9 pt).
- To get a reader's attention, use bulleted lists, short sentence fragments and explanatory subheads. Use **bold** occasionally to draw attention to key points.

Navigation

- Organize the online newsroom from the perspective of a new visitor.
- Make it easy for new users to find your newsroom by including newsroom links on your home page and in your website's footer (known as site-persistent navigation). This will also make it easier for search engines to find your newsroom.
- Hyperlink key words to similar content on your website such as related press releases. Also consider hyperlinking to other partner organizations or relevant websites that provide related content to give your text more authority.

RSS

- RSS feeds are free content web feeds that contain headlines, summaries and links to information. RSS is an important tool to distribute and syndicate your content.
- These days, most journalists use RSS feeds daily because it's an effective way to filter information. When a user subscribes to an RSS feed, updated information and/or news is automatically sent to them. Instead of having to search websites to find out what's new, journalists receive regular updates from the websites they've selected. You can set up an RSS feed with free online services such as FeedBurner. RSS feeds are typically categorized by topic. Think about the beats or interests of the journalists and bloggers you frequently contact and customize your feeds accordingly.

ATTRACTING VISITORS

Search optimize your content to drive visitors to your website. Include a link to your newsroom in all materials sent to reporters.

- Use key words strategically throughout your website, particularly in headlines, titles and introductory paragraphs or summaries. Search engines use key words to prioritize and filter searches, so if your online newsroom is about coastal issues in Oregon, make sure that your website content includes "marine reserves" and "Oregon" in headlines and other sections.
- Drive traffic to your newsroom by including a link to it in all emails and other communications with reporters, bloggers, experts, researchers and others interested in the issues your organization addresses.

TRACKING VISITORS

Use tools such as Google Analytics to measure and analyze traffic.

- Measure your website's traffic with free and easy to use tools such as Google Analytics and Site Meter. Google Analytics allows you to track visitors to your website as well as their location.
- For more specialized or detailed tracking needs, you can purchase web analytics software from companies such as WebTrends.

EXAMPLES

Purple West, <http://www.purplewest.com/>

Climate Extremes, <http://www.climate-extremes.com/>

Conservation International, <http://www.conservation.org/newsroom/>

NRDC, <http://www.nrdc.org/media/>

Greenpeace, <http://www.greenpeace.org/usa/press-center/>



TO GO Make the most of your online newsroom.

1. Keep it current, accurate and readable.
2. Provide compelling visuals in all forms.
3. Make sure your sources and contacts are accessible to the media and that their information is up to date.
4. Promote your newsroom with search engine optimization and RSS feeds.
5. Make information easy to find and easy to use.
6. Make sure someone in your organization can regularly update content.

Special Thanks To

Guest editor Cheryl Contee, consultant and partner at Fission Strategy whose private practice specializes in helping major non-profit organizations, tech startups, Fortune 500 companies and leading trade associations manage their brands and their campaigns online with a focus on Web 2.0, social media and blogger relations. She is also a blogger and co-founder writing as Jill Tubman on one of the top 10 black blogs online, Jack and Jill Politics. She has over 13 years of award-winning interactive expertise and previously served as lead digital strategist for Fleishman-Hillard for the West Coast in San Francisco.

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Resource Media's New Communications Initiative (NCI) is a program designed to increase and expand the understanding and application of new communications trends and technologies. NCI provides research and resources to help you and others in our broad community stay ahead of the curve.

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ENDNOTES

¹ 2007 Arketi Web Watch Survey: Inside B-to-B Media Usage of Web 2.0, <http://www.marketingcharts.com/print/b2b-journalists-blogs-other-online-sources-more-than-ok-to-use-2295/arketi-b2b-journalists-internet-usejpg/>

