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Multimedia Reporting: Creating Unique Content that Spans Multiple Platforms

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MULTIMEDIA REPORTING:
CREATING UNIQUE CONTENT THAT SPANS MULTIPLE PLATFORMS

A Capstone Experience/Thesis Project Presented

in Partial Fulfillments of the Requirements

for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts with

Honors College Graduate Distinction at Western Kentucky University

By:

Joshua Carl Holland

*****

Western Kentucky University
2015

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ABSTRACT

With the continued ease of access to the internet, it has become a vital medium to distribute news and sports information. This study documents the process of starting from a relatively absent online product to developing daily web content. Trial and error of different original content ideas for online as well as experimentations with translating broadcast content into a web product are coupled with interviews from professionals to create a framework of how to go about establishing an internet presence in an age of instant news. The case is generally focused on sports media due to the nature of my most covered content but the findings can and should be applied to news as well.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

VITA

April 29, 1993……………………………………………….Born – Nashville, Tennessee

2010…………………………………………………………Eagle Scout Recipient

2011…………………………………………………………John Overton High School –
                                                                                      Nashville, TN
2011……………………………………………………….Valedictorian – John Overton

2014………………………………………………………….Intern – St. Louis Post-Dispatch

2015……………………………………………………....Kappa Tau Alpha Inductee

2015………………………………………………………Outstanding Broadcsat Student
                                                                                      Potter College of Arts and Letters
2015……………………………………………………….Kentucky AP Award Finalist
                                                                                      Best Televsion Reporter
                                                                                      Best Sports Coverage

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Broadcast News

Minor Field: Athletic Coaching

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: GATEWAY TO THE IDEA

The process of web fascination began in March of 2014 with an application for an unorthodox internship position for a broadcast student doing videography at a newspaper. The St. Louis Post-Dispatch's idea to do television-style videos for their web product, stltoday.com, spawned the realization that I did not have to wait for an opportunity on broadcast airwaves to publish a product. Over the course of three months at the paper, I involved myself in projects of different types (sports, news, features) and using various styles of equipment to produce unique content for the web. These products were most frequently posted during business hours but, on multiple occasions, I was afforded the opportunity to publish a piece after an hour that would have been suitable for broadcast TV or a newspaper; videos hit the web as late as 1 a.m. and as early as 5 a.m.. The expanse of the internet provided me the ability to expand my skills into the realms of still photography and print-style writing because online is most suited for the combination of different mediums rather than the exclusion of ones that don't fit traditional news dissemination systems.

Through work with Video Director Gary Hairlson and Copy Managing Editor Bob Rose, I began to understand the importance that video plays in the world of web content. During one specific meeting with Rose, he constantly said that advertisers want

video online. That interaction stuck in my mind as proof that a broadcast skillset can make an impact online.

I estimate that I posted a video online just short of three times per week during my internship. Of course, that was just a small part of the overall work flow that the Post had going through their site but, three posts per week seemed more than plausible for our student news and sports websites. However, I was astonished when I ventured to www.newschannel12live.com/extrapoint (the student sports site) and saw that the last post had come in October of the previous year (about nine months previous to when I looked), and that had been made by one of the professors. Rewind to May 2, 2013, and that was the date I saw as the last time a student at Western Kentucky University had posted any form of story on the website. In fact, from December 8th, 2010 through August 24th, 2014 (the day before our first post of the semester), only 108 videos had been posted in that nearly four year time frame. That equates to less than two and a half videos posted per month in that span. The platform remained untapped.

WKU Football Midseason Report

October 1, 2013   Category: Local Sports, Sports, WKU Sports
Reporter: Brad Pfranger | Edit

Midseason Report

Perkins Back on the Mound

May 2, 2013 | Category: Sports, WKU Sports
Reporter: Jason Martin | Edit

Tanner Perkins Back on the Mound

I decided to tap that medium for the advancement of the student broadcast and for this Capstone Experience Thesis. Sneak peak: from August 25th, 2014 through April 16th, 2015, 204 videos hit the Newschannel12 YouTube page before making their way to our website. That's 25.5 videos per month. The following is a documentation of interviews and trials and errors that resulted in a better understanding of how to use the internet as a way to facilitate news to consumers.

CHAPTER 2

IN THEIR PROFESSIONAL OPINION

Over the course of the past few months, I reached out to various professionals in

the industry from newspapers and television to gauge what models have already been

successful. Brad Odil, VP of Sales/Station Manager at WBKO Television in Bowling

Green, KY, gave insight at an interesting time for WBKO. They had just finalized a deal

and were one week away from establishing a web-only sports journalist position. The job

came about after seeing a similar position take off in a larger market in Louisville, KY.

Odil wanted to bring a print-style journalist over to WBKO.com to fortify the depth of

sports coverage that newspapers were able to attain. The addition of the sports journalist

for his website solved an interesting conundrum for Odil. "You're kind of trapped in this

world of 'Am I getting information for my 10 o'clock news to do video or am I there to

be a true journalist?'"(Odil, 2015). So, Odil brought one of the senior writers from the

Bowling Green Daily News to support that effort to cover his newscast and his web

presence.

To market this job to his superiors, Odil used other rising mediums for news

dissemination, Twitter and Facebook, to gauge how deep certain sports journalists were

"penetrating the market" or how many households they were reaching. After comparing

the market penetration of his own reporters against the job that the two trailblazing

journalists in Louisville, Odil found that 5% market penetration was a solid number in determining how successful the new position could be. Not only was his thinking forward on the need for the position but his use of social media as a benchmark for determining who would fill that position shows a distinct trend in where consumers are looking for their product.

Odil mentioned the last 8-10 years as the time frame for web content becoming of increasing importance to newsmakers. During that window, he noted a specific advantage that he has on the television side.

> Newspapers, in the early days, had broadcasters by the throat. And, had they done it well, they would be in a much better place than they are today. They were writing better stories and people were going to them for better content…..That model continues to decline and, therefore, they are trying desperately to pick up online as a new revenue model because people aren't picking up the newspaper to read it anymore. Luckily, for broadcasters, we haven't lost those eyeballs for television in that same window. When high-definition television came along, the amount of time people watched TV during the day increased. So, our revenue model for television remains the same and we are trying to grow what we do online. (Odil, 2015)

Odil might have a leg up in his base revenue model but, he admitted that everyone is on the same playing field when it comes to profiting off of the internet. "We all know that we have got to do something big online to make these revenue models grow or we can't support that anymore. We are all still trying to figure out how to monetize the web." The importance of that statement can't be overstated. While, content producers (reporters)

continue to rack their brains for better ways to use the internet with more creative ideas, more in depth pieces, and creation of unique jobs, people in sales at these very same entities are trying to figure out how to make money on a portion of the industry that continues to grow with advancements in technology. Odil tried creating website managers and specific ad salesmen for the web and said that those models didn't work for bringing in increased revenue. He found more success in training his existing staff to sell everything when it comes to ads and complimenting that current staff with one person that has an expertise in the field.

Odil also noted that his mindset did not change to fit into an online format but that the online format fit squarely into his preexisting model. "I have been telling people for years. We are not a TV station. We are a local content provider. When you look at it that way, you aren't pigeon-holed into either just being for TV or just being for online." That flexibility, when producing unique content for both broadcast/print and online proves to be of the utmost importance due to the different natures of the medium according to Carrie Pratt, Multiplatform News Advisor for the College Heights Herald in Bowling Green.

A web audience is completely different from a broadcast audience. I could sit down and watch a story on the nightly news and they could do a standup and I'll be riveted and I'll watch it because it is someone speaking with authority on an issue. Give me that video on a computer and I'm not going to spend my time doing it.

Pratt spent undergrad at Western Kentucky before going to work at the Tampa Bay Times. During her time at the paper, she went to graduate school to learn video because

she felt that her employer wasn't doing an adequate job of teaching the new wave of journalism. After coming back from graduate school, newly trained in the art of shooting and editing video, Pratt said that many of her former coworkers were pushed out of the door due to their unwillingness or inability to adapt, a theme that is less common but still apparent today.

"It still surprises me when I hear push back. It's 2015. You have to get up to speed." Pratt said. While she stated many times that people in the newspaper industry have a need to continually adapt, she was quick to note that many people think that adaptation goes much farther than simply conforming to traditional broadcast video in an effort to keep up with the competition. "To me, newspapers don't see broadcast journalism as the future of video storytelling. I think they are trying to figure out what that is currently" (Pratt, 2015).

After talking with Odil, it's safe to say that he agrees that broadcast TV models have to be modified, just as print ones do, to accommodate a different style of audience on the web. He noted that one of his main problems is taking scripts that were designed to be less than one minute and simply copying those to online. "That's not good enough. The online people, they need a lot more information. They need to be able to click through to learn more about that story. That's our struggle right now." Odil and Pratt shared the same struggle from both sides, attempting to find the best way to use the web as a means of content. But, regardless of the types of content being published or the views on which of those types is the future of the industry, there seemed to be a consensus on the need for more hands on the web portion of media outlets. Brad Odil said that if he had it his way, laughing while saying that he never would, the staff size

would double solely for web content. "We have roughly 18 people in our newsroom; that includes editors and producers. We need another staff of 18 over here just doing online content. We need a whole nother journalism department devoted to online and let those two work together for the deepest, most compelling stories we can pull off" (Odil, 2015). That sentiment was echoed by Aaron Ellis, Assignment Editor for WAVE3 News in Louisville, "We have 6 full time people assigned to the web. That does not include the reporters that also write their stories for the web. The amount of content we push to mobile & web we could use 10 full timers just to handle our load which is considered 24/7, 365."

Ellis provided the same venue, a television station, as Odil but, brought a different context to it through his position as assignment editor. With Ellis working closely with reporters as they are out in the field, he has a firm understanding of what extra steps are being asked of newsmakers, especially in regards to social media. He noted that the times of a news crew going out and having time to develop their story for a six or eleven p.m. newscast are in the past.

> The goal is to make the story you are covering an interactive type story so that the public can engage and ask questions to the reporters even before the story hits air. Crews are required to send back a picture of breaking news when they arrive on scene and then start tweeting and socialing as much as they can while still gathering. It is important that the story moves online before it moves on broadcast. Thanks to all smart phones, tablets and other devices they expect the news to arrive as it is happening. (Ellis, 2015)

Ellis maintained that broadcast TV is still the largest power player in the industry but, even then, most of his content is aimed for an audience that isn't sitting in front of the television at home.

> I have been in the business coming up on 17 years and the entire news gathering process has changed mostly because of social media. Almost all we do now is geared for the web. We have what is called the 3 screens (broadcast, mobile, web) and almost everything is geared to mobile & web. (Ellis, 2015)

Even though both Carrie Pratt and Brad Odil gave a rough estimate of the last ten years for the evolutionary age of online journalism, both of them spoke as if it was in its infancy. There seemed to be an excited uncertainty of what web content would entail in the future coupled with a strong belief that it is the future no matter what that entails. Aaron Ellis finished up his interview with a quick hitting statement that is focused on broadcast television but is indicative of print as well.

> "Bottom line is. TV as it has been know is no longer."

CHAPTER 3

FORMATTING FROM THE START

In principle, the idea seemed easy: There is no content. Start posting content. But the reality of the situation is that a user friendly, aesthetically pleasing website is very important in the process of creating an online base of content. Much of my time during the first week of the Fall semester was dedicated to learning the software of the website and improving its functioning.

When I first signed in as an administrator for the site, there were a few noticeable issues. Firstly, as the figures on page 10 show, the dropdown menu was incongruent with the website's sports coverage. The drop down menu should be representative of dominant areas of influence but, instead, simply said "Sports" before giving you the option to click further. While the Sports section did include WKU Sports, there was no distinction between the different sports offered at the school. This makes using the search function difficult because you cannot simply inquire about "WKU Softball" because the website would send you to all WKU Sports. Furthermore, instead of listing individual high schools, the next dropdown option was Local Sports. This is problematic because it places no distinction between amateur high school athletics and a professional team that happens to reside in the same city. Without a separator between the two, consumers have a harder time finding prep sports which happen to be one of the top reasons why people are attracted to sports locally.
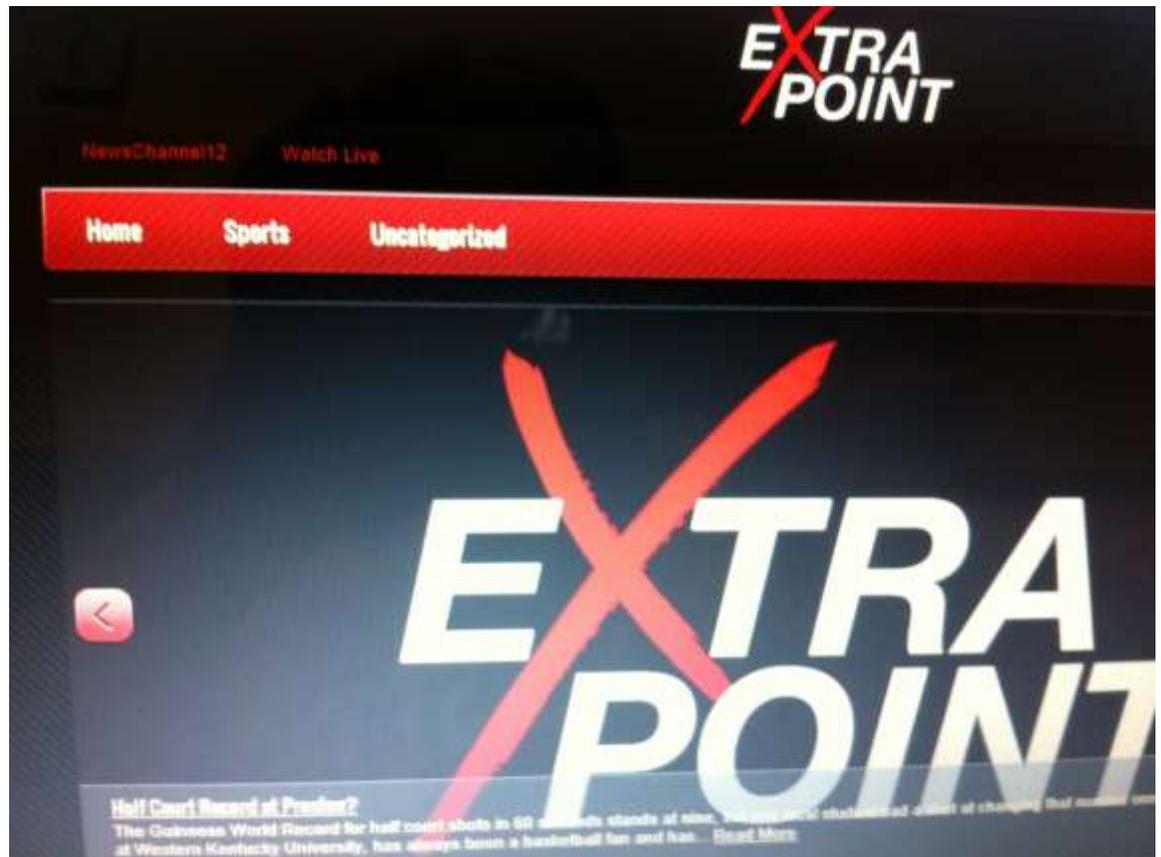
There were also season specific drop downs such as "Bowl Game News" or "March Madness" that not only were irrelevant for 10 months a year but weren't even used properly when they were relevant.

After changing the dropdown menu, it became apparent that the site was not geared to take you any further than the opening page. While, our sports and news station is non-commercial, a basic principle of commercial websites is getting the consumer to click deeper into your site. Newschannel12live.com/extrapoint only showcased the top

five stories with the same pieces showing up on a sidebar under a section called "Recent Posts." The slider at the top of the screen also rotated the exact same five articles or videos but did so with basic logos or graphics that were not appealing enough for someone to want to click on the feature story to get to the next article.

The page viewer needed more options and more information. Above all, the viewer needed more reason to stay on our page and not visit someone else's. So, the sidebar was revamped with a video section that holds unique videos that will not show up on the feature slider or "Recent Posts" tab. I also added sections to chronicle the results of the last game for individual teams as well as the upcoming games for those teams. Those changes to the sidebar gave page viewers new information as well as another video on the front page because, according to Brad Odil, "Video drives the web." And, any video that can keep people on our website is worth having at the head of the page.

The biggest challenge in the formatting process of the website came in not having too much familiarity with wordpress.com, the site through which our domain name is hosted. Learning the intricacies of that software, so that I could in turn teach that to others, took any time that I would have had for content production in the early going of the semester.

I spent hours searching through different website themes so that I could find one that would help rebrand our website but ended up staying with the original format. Through that process, I picked up certain advantages that our theme had over others as well as different drawbacks for which I would have to account when posting content. Specific limitations of our site include the lack of a plugin that would show a live feed of our Twitter account and what our last few posts had been. To counteract that, I found

smaller buttons that you can place on your websites page that, when activated, will direct the viewer from your site to your Twitter homepage. It is not ideal to take the viewer away from your site but, in this case it was necessary.

The beginning of this process involved some frustration with the site itself as well as the lack of existing functions from the previous web producer, but, the work put in early in the semester paved the way for the easier uploading of content later on in the year.

CHAPTER 4

ESTABLISHING WORKFLOW AND OVERCOMING OTHER CHALLENGES

By far the most challenging part of the process was establishing a workflow. In every other aspect of the student broadcast program, there was an order of events. Get your story approved. Finish your story. Run your story on TV. Or, get assigned a position. Show up to your position. Fill that position for the newscast. But, the web was this new entity that somehow everyone simultaneously used and knew nothing about. Before even getting into the specifics of teaching people the process, there had to be a mindset change among participants in the broadcasting department for the online portion of our work to take off.

For the most part, people had a series of events set in their mind as to what constituted the beginning and end of their story production. The perceived end of the story process was having it signed off and putting it in our server for air in the newscast. Then you wipe your hands clean of it. Anything passed that was looked at as extra unnecessary work which made it difficult to establish the need for web-based content. Luckily, I had a core group of individuals who, like myself, had been in a professional setting where they grew to understand the importance of web content. Through those people, we were able to shift perspective from an extra step in the process to a necessary step in the process.

My goal, which I think was achieved to a certain extent, was to have people view the post of a link for their story as the end game for a reporter. Many of our students have Twitter and the majority of the students have Facebook accounts but none of them were maximizing these tools as a way of showing people what they had produced. Both of those mediums are such powerful tools because you have the ability to tag anyone in your post and, if they resonate with it or like what you put out, they can easily share to their friends or followers. This is an underutilized advantage, especially when doing feature pieces or stories on the works of an organizations, because a simple share can grow your viewership exponentially simply because they organization or person was attached to the story when it was sent out.

After the initial hurdle of getting people mentally focused on advancing web content, came the arduous process of making sure everyone was signed up as a content provider for the site. Because there are three different upper level classes producing content for the news and sports shows and two workshops to go along with that, there are five groups of people that needed to be addressed with login information for the site. I had to set a time aside with my advisor to not only work on the process of getting those people signed in to our domain, but also discussing which people were suited to contributors, authors, editors, etc.. The distinction between those had to do with autonomy of publishing your own content and then ability to edit others' pieces. These decisions weren't easy because we had to balance both the academic level of the student and the responsibility threshold that they had shown up to that point with the program up to that point. Even after running through the bulk of our students to get them credentials

for the website, there was the occasional person who had content but no login and the far more frequent person who had both but no idea of how to put those in motion.

Another issue that had to be worked through was the chasm between the development of an outlet that can be used for news around the clock without the availability of equipment around that clock.

My first struggle was to get a laptop that was armed with editing software. After coming back from a large paper in a substantial market that offered a wealth of resources, I had to readapt to the situation at WKU where the equipment was not yet in place. I wanted to use that computer, and I did, to post stories from arenas and stadiums without the hassle of running back to the editing lab on campus or the frustration of wanting to edit those stories after normal editing hours. Due to the nature of our sports show, a weekly 30-minute highlight show, we were perennially behind everyone else when it came to showing highlights or putting out information; most of the games were irrelevant by the time our sportscast rolled around. I explained to the advisor of our television program, Brad Pfranger, the importance of having a mobile editing base and the projects I would like to do with one and he pulled some strings to acquire three computers, one that I would use regularly for web content and two that were designed for live shots and online streaming during newscasts. The work that Brad devoted to gaining these laptops for our program further solidified my desire to grow web content as a valid way to spend my time.

Along with the need for mobile editing, came the necessity of having equipment ready to go. At a professional news outlet, that simply means that a reporter keeps a camera in their trunk or ready at their house in preparation for news to break. But, the

reality of the situation at WKU is that our department has 15 cameras. Now those are brand new cameras that shoot high-definition video which is a huge benefit for web content but, there are only fifteen that are shared between five upper level broadcasting classes, two television workshops, and an entire film sequence. The equipment room hours are also three hours per day making it very difficult to acquire a camera if news breaks at 11:01 am on a Monday (the room closes at 11). This prompted an increased communication between the students in the program as well as a heightened sense of urgency involved with checking cameras out of the equipment room. No longer was it acceptable for there to be a shortage of cameras leading to the lack of a story for a newscast. We know had more than 22 minutes of news and 22 minutes of sports to fill per week and charged the students in our program with finding a way to get the equipment necessary to cover the increased amount of content.

Online streaming has been a goal of the program for a few years now but remains one of the stumbling blocks that we have yet to surpass. A few years ago, Newschannel12 and the ExtraPoint used a third party application to publish a stream online during the live production but the quality was such that we wanted to try other options. After a push from myself and our News Director, our advisor and the chief engineer established a hardwired connection to our program output so that we could live stream more clearly. However, the progress halted there. While we continue to try other third parties such as YouTube and Google Hangouts to facilitate our stream onto the website, it has not come to fruition yet and remains our top desired advancement going forward for the program.

As we continued to post more and more content on the website, we uncovered different, more efficient ways of doing so. Students had been accustomed to posting Quicktime Movie files onto YouTube when building resume reels or publishing to their own personal site but that proved to take up too much time, sometimes as much as an hour for one video. We found that there was a software made by Adobe called Media Encoder which allowed us to change the file type into a smaller (MP4) file that uploaded in under two minutes effectively cutting anywhere from 30 minutes to an hour out of the time required to get files on to the web.

As we continued to use YouTube as our file hosting site, we became more familiar with the intricacies of attaching those videos to our website. At first, we had to locate a 6-10 code in the URL that was then placed strategically in the article for it to show up properly. But, after a website update, it became possible to simply copy an embed code that is located underneath the video player. That code not only loaded the product onto our site more efficiently but, it allowed us to preview each piece of video while still in the draft stage of the uploading process, a feature that was not afforded to us with the original means of upload.

While video may drive the web, pictures get people to click on stories. It was a task to get students in the mindset that a photograph is necessary for a broadcast video because there is a natural disconnect in people's minds between videography and still photography. But, when coupled together, they can be a powerful means of both grabbing and maintaining audience attention. The advancement of smart phones and video cameras made it increasingly easy to fulfill this need for still images. Due to the resolution of computer screens, a picture online does not require the depth and contrast that only a

professional still camera can provide. You can supplement that equipment with pictures

from and iPhone or other smart phone or even increase the frame rate on your camera so

that you capture more frames per second in your video. The latter of those two gives you

the option of exporting a graphic directly from the video to use as a feature photo or a

teaser picture for social media. It also saves you time in the field because you don't have

to spend time looking for the perfect picture when you will have thousands of frames to

choose from in for finalized video piece.

Another step in the process of getting information, photos, and videos to

consumers more quickly involved the coordination of another work of social media,

Instagram, alongside Twitter. Through observation of other media outlets in the market, I

noticed that their followers would get pregame and often post game pictures on

Instagram. This is important because tweeting out or posting on your website that there is

"a packed crowd" only holds so much weight. But, sending out a picture or video of that

same crowd can help set the stage for people that are at home or on the move and are

unable to watch the game. It also serves as a means of expanded content. It sounds brash

but, you can post a video of something seemingly meaningless to the outcome of the

game (i.e. players doing layup lines, a task they perform before every game) with a

caption about the upcoming contest instead of just giving someone text on social media.

Account for the fact that there are 13 players on a basketball roster, and you already have

13 different pregame video angles to share over the course of a 30 game season, and

that's just basketball. As we traveled to Marshall University for a game in late November,

there was a scuffle that broke out before kickoff. From the press box, I was able to get a

quick video and picture that was representative of what happened at mid-field to go along

information about the two teams confronting each other on the field. That was much more effective than simply describing it with just words. Instagram also gives you the ability to connect it with other social media applications so that your follower base on one (Twitter, Facebook, and even Tumblr) can become your audience on another with little extra effort on the part of the newsmaker.

Not only did we have to change the minds of students that were not used to an extra step in the process of posting their already polished pieces to the web, but they also were not accustomed to thinking of innovative ways to fill the web with different content or understanding the work that would go into fulfilling those creative ideas. This was evident when I had the idea of doing game day weather forecasts with StormCenter12, Newschannel12's in house student weather team. The goal was to use weather on the ExtraPoint's website as yet another way to produce content for the weekend's game. It was produced and uploaded on Friday's during football season, the slowest day of content during the season. However, I made the mistake of not bringing others into the process. Not only did that make shooting, editing, and uploading the weather preview more arduous for myself but it led to missing some Friday previews when I was not able to commit the time and no one else in the program had knowledge of how to go about filming it from start to finish. This served as an opportunity to learn from the mistake of not bringing others in on the process and how that can affect the workflow of ideas.

The entire process involved, and still involves, working through unexpected issues or learning better ways to go about the process of online production, but through conversations with Brad Odil, Carrie Pratt, and Aaron Ellis along with the other students I work with, it is apparent that everyone is experiencing these growing pains, even at

professional news stations. But, those stumbles along the way were well worth the

frustration because it gave myself and other upperclassmen in our program the

perspective necessary to teach the next wave of online content leaders in the School of

Journalism and Broadcasting.

CHAPTER 5

EXPANDED WEB OF OPPORTUNITIES

The process of establishing a framework took time, more time than expected. But, all of those barriers that were crossed set out a rough outline of how the site would look and function. From there, all we had to do is think of innovative ways to fill that framework.

The first thing we accomplished wasn't exactly groundbreaking but it was as important as anything else we did. Starting with the week before WKU's first football game, our sports site started a trend of posting content 3-5 days per week. Before we had skipped certain press conferences and not been present at most post-practice conferences due to the reality that, by the time we needed that content on a Thursday, it was outdated. Football season was a great opportunity to establish that consistency because they held four press conferences during the week and a game on the weekend. It was irresponsible of us to not take advantage of that in previous seasons, and once we did, content started to come very easily. We were also able to capitalize on the first three weeks of the semester which are generally used for getting our feet underneath us and cultivating interest in newer students before our first show on the fourth week of the academic calendar. By the first show in previous years, we had already missed three football games, three weeks of press conferences, and the same coverage for Fall sports like soccer and volleyball. Because we were able to post content online, there was validation

to send students out during the first weeks of the semester to gain more shooting experience well before the first broadcast program on television.

After taking advantage of those first few weeks and the opportunities that they provided, it was our task to differentiate our site with unique content ideas. One of which, mentioned earlier, was a game day weather forecast. While it was still up and running, the forecast not only filled that Friday slot of necessary content but it also filled the video player section on the side bar of our website. While it lasted, it also served as another opportunity for our skilled meteorology students to hone their skills on camera. That spawned the idea to have daily weather forecasts that we could post online. We wanted to capitalize on the public desire for updated weather but didn't get to it during the first semester.

We also wanted to adapt some online or print style formats that we had seen done before into broadcast style web pieces by incorporating reporters on camera. Once again, we tried to capitalize on the lack of Friday content by doing a segment called "Will They or Won't They" where we previewed the weekend's game with three things the team would need to do and recapped the game the next Monday and discussed whether or not they accomplished that goal. This idea was good in principle but didn't really allow us to provide the depth of content that some of the written preview pieces did due to time constraints so we stopped the production of those pieces. At first, stopping an idea seems like a failure, but in reality, it is a stepping stone to a better idea. In the early going of the Spring semester, we were saddled with snow which hampered our ability to do broadcast television shows. During a three weeks span, we had two sports shows canceled which would have been vastly detrimental had we had nowe presence or been in the beginning

stages of production as we had been the year before. Our show had planned to interview the Director of Athletics, Todd Stewart, live during the show but, instead, did an on-court interview and posted it to the web. That served as our first Report from the Court. Over the next few weeks, we did 2-3 Reports per week, at first doing them pregame and then realizing that it was a better option to do them as recaps after the games. We evolved from simple two man on camera conversations to post-game analysis with highlights covering the talking heads in just one weekend. Two weeks from that first Report, it provided us another outlet for content publication when our second show was canceled due to inclimate weather. Just one year ago, when snow canceled school for a few days at the beginning of the week, we did nothing in the way of shooting and editing like we did this season. The online presence has proved important because it consistently gives us a platform for new ideas as well as an outlet to publish when outside forces take the broadcast element out of our hands.

The theme of expanded opportunities does not only apply to web production but also to younger students in the broadcasting program. Due to reasonable class constraints that students have to meet before getting an on-air opportunity, people in the major don't generally get on camera until their first semester of Junior year, if they plan their classes accordingly. However, those same requirements do not exist for online content meaning that freshman and sophomores may participate in projects like Reports from the Court or, our newest endeavor, the Sports, News, and Weather Minutes. Those brief, minute to minute and a half, segments provide quick content for both our news and sports websites but, of equal importance is the ability of younger students to get on camera and receive constructive criticisms and learn about their own on-air presence well before they make it

to the point of being live on one of our broadcast programs. Figure 5.1 on page 23 is a

screen grab from YouTube plays of our first round of those Minutes.

News Channel 12
Weather Minute 2/25
1 day ago · 69 views
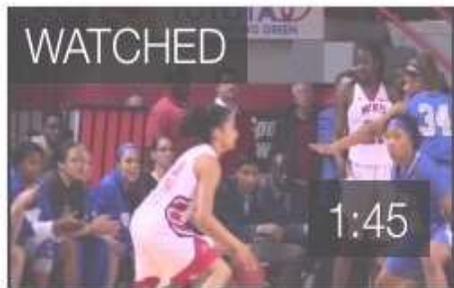
News Channel 12
Sports Minute 2/25
1 day ago · 36 views

News Channel 12
News Minute 2/25
1 day ago · 305 views

Those 305 views on the News Minute came in just over one day after being promoted through Facebook and Twitter. The idea for the Minutes also received praise from and Emmy winning producer at Newschannel 4 in Nashville as long as another Music City mogule, Sports Director and Fox 17, Paul Jones.

Along with the on-camera opportunity, less experienced students are charged with building those short blocks of content. This gives them a taste of what goes into the production side of the operation, a theme that echoes class requirements of taking part in shooting, editing, and writing before getting the chance to have your face on the screen. What we found over the course of the first few minutes, especially the sports one, is that we are able to give them advice that they might not receive in a performance class especially since those classes are geared towards news. We can give them an outlet to be themselves on camera and figure out their identity at an earlier point in their broadcast career. Secondarily, this will hopefully instill in them the gravity of online content production since they see first-hand that it provides them the ability to hone their skills and also increases the visibility of the program.

During the senior year of a broadcast journalism major, students are required to take a Capstone class in order to graduate. Usually that class is split into reporters, anchors, and producers but, with the advanced emphasis on the web, our class now has two seniors devoted to online production with another two (myself included) adding a focus on it to their existing Capstone path. This has afforded our program with more helping hands but also created a slot for two young ladies to thrive when they weren't set on being one of the three traditional options. Adding these two web-producers and

continuing to bring new people into the fold of online-production makes the process much easier on myself and the News Director.

In addition to wells of opportunity that we have already tapped, this program can continue to grow in ways already conceived as well as ways that someone else will think of down the road. There is a place online and a stable of capable meteorologists in place for our station to produce daily weather. It wouldn't be easy at first; none of this thesis has been easy at first. But, once four or five people were trained to run the studio and the same number of forecasters were in place to deliver the weather, there is no reason that a program of this caliber cannot put out daily weather alerts of one and a half to three minutes. Much of my goal through this process has been to develop a product that can compete intellectually and creatively with anyone in the market. Daily weather would be a leap forward in that direction.

Breaking news packages are an area of expected growth in the future. Our program proved when the Corvette Museum suffered the sink-hole collapse that our coverage was more than adequate by how regional stations contacted us for content. If the emphasis on online content continues and the equipment suited for it continues to be available, this program should be able to put out spot news stories instead of always waiting to run a story the next Tuesday or Thursday.

As of now, the Report from the Court and one instance at Marshall have been the only true post-game wraps that involve highlights. Our students are capable of this on a regular basis. Consistency is paramount and if people in the program continue to work to promote that reliability of content by producing feature stories, news, and sports coverage

on the days of the week without news and sportscasts, then there is no reason that this program can't compete with local news outlets.

CHAPTER 6

BACKPACK JOURNALISM

Backpack journalism or one-man banding, two coined phrases that epitomize the new era of broadcast journalism. The ability to pick and go anywhere is crucial now in media. Reporters and photographers now have the equipment to edit and upload files anywhere that has wireless internet; McDonalds seems to be a favorite this Chapter details two specific instances, one a short trip and the other a four-day experience that show the capability and viability of an online product.

In November, journalism friends of mine afforded me the opportunity to tag along with them to Huntington, West Virginia, for WKU's matchup with Top-25 ranked Marshall. Our program had traveled to plenty of away games before (i.e. Tennessee, Alabama, Kentucky) but had never had the experience or available equipment to post a story from a different state. So, I set out to make that happen. After staying overnight in a hotel, we arrived a few hours before the noon kickoff. I knew I would have to be timely and would have less than two hours after post-game press conferences had ended. But, if I did it right, I would be the first person with a posted recap that contained highlights (The BG Daily News would have written reports and WBKO would have to wait until their 10 o'clock newscast). So the game began and the teams began putting up a record number of points giving me to get a record, personal record, number of highlights for the postgame as well as the show the upcoming week. The game finished and

the press conference followed shortly thereafter. When all of the filming of the game and team activities subsided, I had to find a way to compile my voice and the highlights without the traditional means of broadcast television where you can watch the highlights as you go.

I decided to stand at midfield and recall a few of the most memorable plays so that once I headed to post production, I could line up those highlights that I had gathered. After recording my voice, I went up to the press box to compile the video. There were some challenges with editing on the road for the first time and adjusting software but, after becoming more comfortable with the new editing system, I put a finished product up online at http://www.newschannel12live.com/extrapoint/the-score-herd-round-the-world/.

That post made it online at roughly 8 p.m. making it the first video content of the game uploaded, before local news stations and with video that local newspapers could not provide. It was a big point of pride in the process of developing the online presence because it was the first, but not last, time that our station was able to provide immediate content post-game like we had not been since my time on the hill started.

That particular piece became a finalist for the Kentucky Associated Press Awards for Sports Coverage legitimizing that we are able to turn pieces in a timely fashion without sacrificing quality of content.

Backpack journalism can now even involve one of the three screens that Aaron

Ellis mentioned, mobile. Not only can reporters now shoot quality videos on their smart

phones, but they can also access their website to make sure that content is dispersed

correctly. Given that many people have access to internet and social media on their smart

phone devices or tablets that they carry around, it is very important that our mobile site is

compatible with phones. Figures 6.1-6.3 show the mobile version of our site.
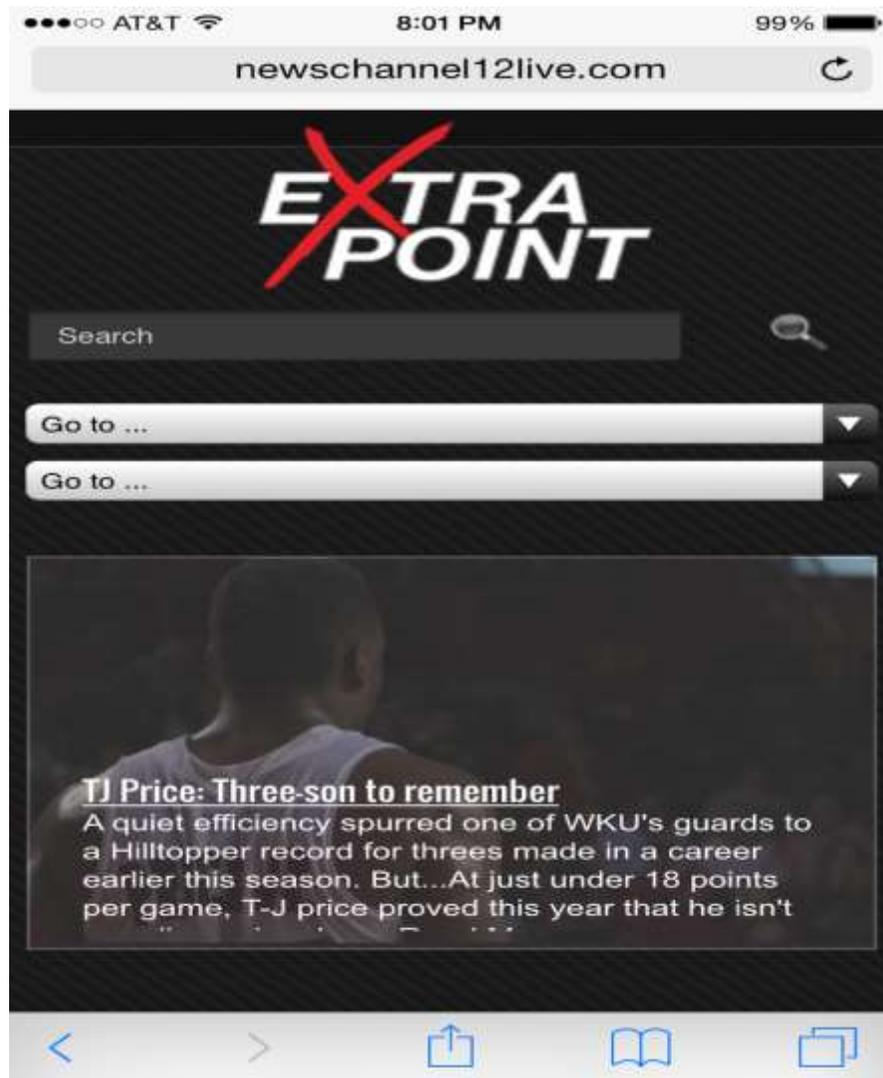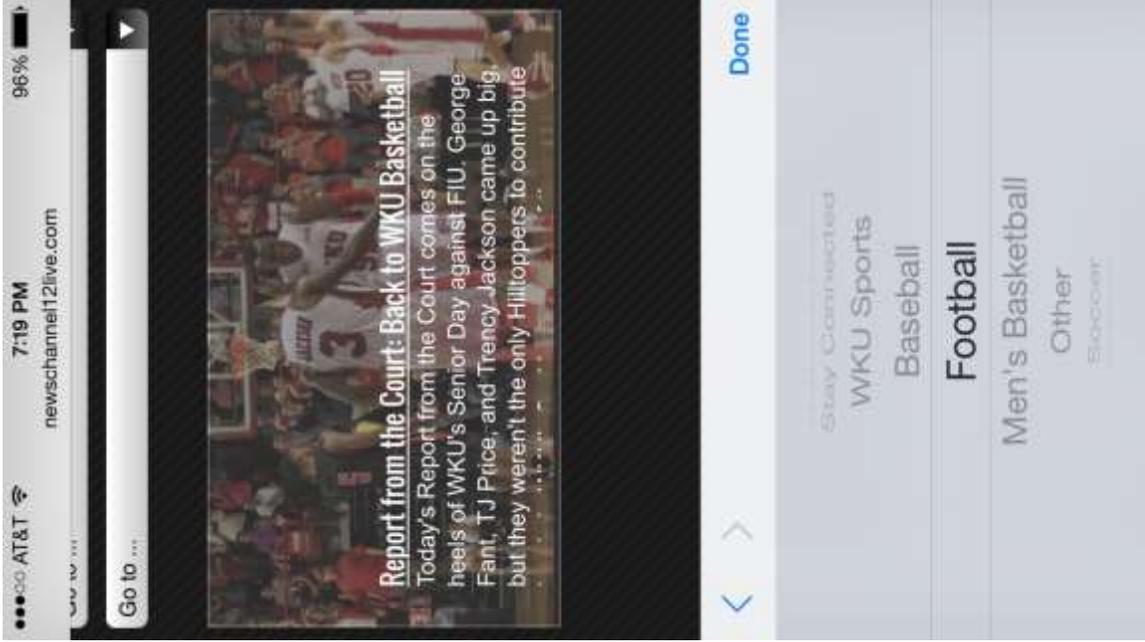
Spring Break was both a culmination and another focused experiment into what our website could produce. I, an online editor, and a photographer made the trip down to Birminghma, AL, for the four-day Conference USA Tournaments hosted by the University Alabama at Birmingham. The plan going into the week was to post highlights for each game, do a news style package, and live-tweet all Hilltopper and Lady Topper basketball games throughout the event. Plans changed when we arrived and learned that we would not shoot our own highlights. At first, we felt mislead and were disappointed but soon learned that it would free us up to do even more work during the course of the games instead of just waiting until the end of the contests to make posts. Our photographer was now able to go and hunt for stories instead of sitting on the sideline and myself and the online editor decided to post pregame, halftime, and post-game print-style pieces along with a daily video wrap for each team. The total came to 17 videos/articles over the course of three and a half days of work. And the total would have been two or three pieces higher had we been able to stay and extra night to produce content instead of driving back (or had the men's team advanced as far as the women's).

Not only did we have the editing capabilities and platform to post that we haven't had before, but we also had time. That is a key component and one that I hope people continue to use. We didn't have course restraints or work obligations so we were able to produce as we would in a professional environment. Granted, looking back we could have spent significantly more time planning how to go about that four-day stretch but, to my knowledge, no one in our TV program had gone to a tournament setting to cover Western Kentucky so what we were doing was unprecedented and we had to react to our surroundings rather than planning beforehand. Fortunately, if one of the younger guys

decides to do the same thing next year, they can pick our brains of how to go about a weekend long tournament most efficiently.

The most successful part of the trip was the diversity of content, not just the shear amount of it. I haven't seen halftime recaps from our TV station before and really haven't seen them from many established journalistic outlets but, we found that it was an easy way to disperse five or so quick hitting facts from the first half and was also more efficient than sending out six or seven tweets from our account about various statistics.

Secondly, we continued doing our Reports from the Court. By the time the tournament rolled around, we had discovered how to turn those 2-3 minute highlight recaps pretty quickly. A theme of our tournament and a theme from this process overall is getting content dispersed quickly without sacrificing quality. I think we were able to do that with the video recaps because, while they were not standard TV highlight reels, they did not need to be. The product was different, and the medium (online) was different so it allowed us to talk about overarching themes while overlaying supporting video. This is similar to the recap from the Marshall football game but differs because we didn't attempt to pin point four or five highlights, we simply pin-pointed the most important themes and talked like we were on a radio show, except well, there was a camera.

We also tried to find innovative ways to preview each contest. This is an example of where being a consumer of online content, and journalistic content as a whole, is essential to developing new ideas. A few months ago, I read some articles from a journalist that covers my favorite college football team. On Fridays, he would ask five or so questions before the game about key factors in whether or not the team would win. On Mondays he would return to the site and answer those questions based off of what he saw

from the game. We decided to adapt a version of that to our product with pieces called "Will They or Won't They". Before each contest in the tournament myself and my online editor would give background information on the game and then pose 3-4 questions of what the team would need to do to emerge victorious. Then, each of us would individually answer "Will They" or "Won't They" and give reasoning behind our arguments. This provided a different means of previewing a game than a standard print-style preview piece and also gave us an accountability to our picks. From experience as a consumer of media and a producer of media, the audience likes to hold journalists accountable. Whether it be something as serious as their view point on a controversial issue, a grammatical or factual mistake that they make, or something as simple as a game pick, consumers tend to go back after the fact and tell people that they were wrong, not so much tell media when they are right. This style of preview piece allowed us, even with a smaller audience, to capture that phenomenon of accountability to our predictions.

In this paragraph's edition of "Things the station hadn't done before", we visit the realm of print game-recaps. Because of not having to devote as much of our staff to shooting and editing video, I was able to be on the bench and work on game recaps while live-tweeting. Our online editor produced the halftime pieces freeing me up to focus solely on the full recap. This didn't happen intentionally but, the second recap piece that I wrote was a hybrid between a traditional "gamer" and a feature piece. The women's basketball team had just won their semi-final game and for the second time in two games, a freshman had spurred them late in the game. The piece can be found here: http://www.newschannel12live.com/extrapoint/tashia-brown-creating-legacy-of-her-own-2/.

Again, this wasn't a traditional recap because it talked about more than just the semi-final game and it focused on one player for half the piece but, if there is a lesson that I learned from online, you can write, shoot, edit a piece ten different ways and none of them are wrong as long as you aren't sacrificing quality. I enjoyed writing those recaps because they provided a depth of statistics and overarching theme that video highlights just don't offer. Carrie Pratt spoke to the nature of online content moving forward and how newspapers don't see broadcast as the future. I think that is because there is that lack of depth because you simply cannot dive into a full story in ninety seconds. However, with online development, you can complement the two mediums with one another and have the entertainment and eye-catching nature of broadcast coupled with the depth of information from print.

We learned plenty of lessons during the four-day tournament that I think will benefit the specific group of guys that went and the rest of the program if they can draw from our experience.

Plan.

Looking back on the weekend, I would have liked to do two television packages instead of just one. Granted, the one that we collaborated on was quite good and a unique angle but we spent the first day searching for places to shoot the story and for interviews. If we had taken the time, a week out from the tournament, to establish contacts and think of one more unique story angle, then we could have spent the first day, where we had eight hours or so before our game, to film another story. We also headed into the weekend intent on doing feature pieces on players in the tournament that were having particularly good games for WKU. But, because we were not able to shoot our own

highlights, we weren't able to get the tight shots and other video aspects needed for a traditional feature piece. However, we could have gone a different route. If put in the same position, I would use the highlights given to us as well as the post-game press conferences and produce a short piece on a successful athlete, maybe a minute or so. That is not the type of package we are used to producing. But once again: unique content, produced quickly, that does not sacrifice quality.

Both the short trip to Marshall and the longer trip to Birmingham provided our program with an opportunity to put new ideas into action. I often times tell my television advisor that my goal is to have him come to our shows and do nothing. That is not because I find no value in his, or any other professors assistance, or have some sort of misplaced arrogance. On the contrary, it is because I aim for the program to be in a position to put out our own fires in practical situations because of the things we have learned in a classroom setting. We had fires to put out in both situations. Editing software did not cooperate at times, video uploading was inconsistent when we needed consistency, and there were unexpected obstacles from the first day we got to Birmingham, including navigating multiple sites. But, we were able to work through those situations because of what we were taught in class and, more importantly, we were in a position to encounter those obstacles because our professors and the Honors College believed that what we were going to do was worthwhile. That is a big hurdle with online; you have to get people to believe that the work is worthwhile.

REFLECTION

THOUGHTS, AND PLANS TO CONTINUE

The process was not easy and it was not consistent, mainly because I was attempting to be an online editor as well as doing the reporting and producing that I have done for the past two years which was already taxing. The news side of our station established a network of people, assigned to do various tasks, that greatly increased our online productivity on that portion of the site and that is the next step for the sports side as well. Our news website had two online producers that worked on content, one on Tuesday while we put our 6 p.m. newscast together and one on Wednesday after the newscast was finished, to ensure that the work done by our students made it onto the website. That workflow started in our capstone class and needs to continue next semester even without the benefit of having that senior class with two people devoted to online.

The best way to do that will be to assign defined roles on a weekly basis. In our current system, we have a schedule that details who will be anchoring on set, who is producing the show, and documents the number of people that are involved in the production aspect during the show. We need to add, on a consistent basis, a schedule for web producers. We have had that on the schedule in the past but, we have never had the people assigned to online and the knowledge of how to most efficiently use the website coincide with each other. Now the opportunity is there. We also have much more interest, especially in the sports category, than we did when I came into the program my freshman year.

There will be a huge turnover next year with the graduation of our capstone class and I think that also signals a time when we need to revamp the leadership roles of our program. When I started in 2012 on WWHR for Redzone Radio, the same guys ran the radio show and the TV sports product, and they did a good job. However, radio didn't get much attention outside of the 30-minutes of air time it received once per week and the show had a twitter account but no twitter or online presence. If we look at the workload now compared to 2012, it has almost doubled. The Redzone Radio show has a chance to build a presence similar to what the ExtraPoint has done in the past year but that will only happen if there is someone devoted specifically to that site, which there will be starting in August.

Currently Redzone has a tab on the ExtraPoint's website but, the goal is to make it into its own brand by not only posting the weekly shows but also doing radio features and print-style releases when breaking news or short stories happen. A similar concept needs to be applied to the ExtraPoint. When I interviewed Brad Odil, I didn't quite grasp why he would need another 18-member staff for his website but I certainly understand now. Our site has been successful in posting nearly all of our feature and news packages but has ample room to grow on posting daily content. When breaking news happens, if a player wins conference athlete of the week, or if there is a schedule change, we need the ability to throw out 250 words instantly. I think that is only possible if we devote a person specifically to the website. Luckily for our operation, we have a solid group of sophomores that we can utilize if they desire the positions. We have already denoted who will take over as executive-producers of the sports show and who will run the radio show

but, if we can find someone who wants a steady position with online and is capable of posting daily content, then this site can take the next step in viability.

Going along with the theme of continuing efficient workflow, the professors in the School of Journalism and Broadcasting have done a good job of integrating what we need for our shows into the course load for their classes. I mentioned earlier that we have two online producers from our senior capstone class and our BCOM 365 class has incorporated online writing into the requirements to pass. The online production process will continue to develop if the school continues to help facilitate it with class requirements. The more people that are involved, the higher the ceiling of content ideas and quantity of content becomes. For instance, at the beginning of last semester with the gameday weather forecasts and throughout this semester with our news, weather, and sports minutes, we have had a good idea and then had to scour our friends in the program to find people to be involved in the production process. That does not happen during the Tuesday and Thursday shows because they have been established for years, are part of the classes here, and have regularly scheduled camera operators, teleprompter operators, and other production essentials. My intent is not to continually strap new requirements on students and have them burn out but, generally, our show has more than one teleprompter operator from BCOM 265 and occasionally there is one-too-many people to run camera from BCOM 266. If we can take one of those people that run prompter and the extra camera person and have them help on Wednesday instead of Tuesday or Thursday, then we have two less people to hunt down for our Minutes.

The beauty of the growth of this broadcast journalism program is that, overall, the pieces produced in classes are improving. During my sophomore and part of junior year, I

would have never turned down a television package (1:30-2:00 minute story) because we HAD to have the content. Now, we have more content so we are forced to turn away one or two stories, from the broadcast product but not from the website. The quality of the lower end, and I mean that in the most respectful way possible, of our content which is produced by sophomores and juniors that are just learning to turn packages has increased dramatically over the past three years. So instead of agreeing, much to my chagrin, to air a story that likely wasn't worth the air-time but was needed to fill time, now I am apologizing to people for not having room on the show for their story but encouraging them to put it on the website.

The point of this thesis is: I wasn't proving a point. I aimed to prove a process. The point is already documented, people use their computers, tablets, and phones to consume and seek content whether that is entertainment or news. The process, however is still debated on a much larger scale than one journalism program in television market number 180. But, the steps taken to improve online content are much the same whether you are a Pulitzer Prize winning paper in St. Louis, a top-50 television market station in Louisville, or the most watched (albeit only) student news and sports cast in the Academic Complex at Western Kentucky University. Find people, both reporters and managers, who understand the importance of online content. Get the necessary equipment to edit and post from outside of the studio. And find a way to think of unique content, produced quickly, that doesn't sacrifice quality.

Thesis: Offline.

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