

The Journalist Toolbox

Over the past couple of years, the number of technologies and websites available to journalists has skyrocketed. With so many new tools at one's disposal, it's hard to keep them all straight and truly focus on the tools most practical for a journalist. Below are five tools that should be in every journalist's toolbox. One of the tools is an actual physical object while the rest are online tools that can make the lives of most journalists a lot easier and more organized.

Tool #1 – Digital Camera

With the shrinking of newsrooms across the country, journalists are expected to do more as part of their job responsibilities. Many are no longer simply required to write whether it's an article or a blog entry, but they also have to take photos for the piece. You never know when a newsworthy event may appear so having a digital camera on your person is a valuable asset and now even a necessity. Obviously photojournalists would be expected to have a nicer camera, but a reporter can still grab great stills with an affordable camera. A digital camera that can record video is also an important quality to have when looking at cameras.

One of the first photographs released to the public from the US Airways crash in the Hudson River was a still someone took with their iPhone on a ferry that was picking some of the flight passengers up. In today's culture that demands immediacy, it wasn't necessary that this individual took the photo with a fancy camera. People just wanted to see firsthand what had happened and the iPhone was sufficient for this need. A digital camera is still preferable over a camera in a cell phone due to the photo quality. However,

a phone camera does enable a reporter to quickly snap a picture and then deliver it to the masses whether it's quickly sending it over to their editor or posting it on Facebook and Twitter.

For freelance journalists or someone hoping to make a career in journalism, a website like Flickr can be a valuable resource. Flickr allows a journalist to upload high-quality photos for free (to a point) or for a \$25 yearly fee. One can include a Flickr slideshow on their personal website to show the type of images he or she has captured. It also provides a great place to store your images and link to them instead of having to host them on one's own server. If a reporter is looking for a way to create an audio slideshow, there are other websites and programs that will allow one to do just that. For example, Soundslides allows its users to produce a visual slideshow with the audio timed to sync up with the appropriate photos. There is a free trial version and if the user is satisfied with the program, it can be bought for \$39.95 for one's PC. Audacity is a free program that enables users to edit audio that can be used as the background music or audio for the slideshow that can be created with iMovie if the user has a Mac.

Tool #2 – Social Networking Websites

With the user numbers for Facebook and Twitter quickly increasing over the last year, these social networking websites have become great resources for coming up with story articles and finding interview subjects. Not only that, but these social media platforms can also become a great place to promote a journalist's personal brand and his or her work.

Facebook can have multiple uses depending on the privacy settings of the reporter's profile. If the journalist opts to have a private profile, he or she will be limited

to getting story ideas and source referrals from friends and limiting it to a select group of people. On the other hand, a reporter who decides to make his or her profile open to the public can use the social network as a way to connect with readers and have a wider pool for story ideas and interview subjects.

LinkedIn enables the reporter to search for users based on a specific company, offering a unique way to specifically search for interviewees. This social network is also known for being a professional social media platform, which can help ensure that it does not look like the reporter is crossing lines and becoming too friendly with a source for example. LinkedIn also offers a place to ask questions on a specific topic, which could become a great resource for background information for an article.

Twitter allows a journalist to reach the public in a way that's not just limited to their close circle of friends if they have a private Facebook account. The retweet feature on Twitter makes it easy for users to forward an interesting tweet or request around Twitterverse (the term given to the collective group of Twitter users). Reporters can use Twitter to promote their new articles or blog posts, engage their readers and followers by asking questions and responding to their inquiries, and break news before writing the article. Twitter will never replace in-depth reporting, nor can it with a 140-character limit. However, it helps foster relationships between reporters and their readers and hopefully encourages people to visit the reporter's website. Twitter can also help break news before the reporter actually has a chance to write up a complete article for either the web or print edition.

Tool #3 – RSS Feed Reader

A RSS feed reader like Google Reader or Bloglines is a great time-saver for reporters. Essentially, the user has to go through and add the subscriptions to websites and blogs he or she likes to read. This tool makes it so users don't have to visit each website or blog they like which can turn unproductive if the websites haven't been updated since the last visit. A reader tells you when a new article or post is up and allows you to quickly view all of the recent posts from that website. Google Reader also provides folders that you can assign websites and blogs to in order to increase one's efficiency. For example, a reporter can have a folder for all websites pertinent to his or her beat. The journalist can also have a folder for all other blogs and websites that may be of personal interest, but don't have anything to do with what someone writes about for work. The feed reader basically organizes all of your go-to websites in a place that ensures you don't miss the latest post or waste time searching for new reading materials.

Tool #4 – Google Alerts

Another beneficial tool for journalists is Google Alerts, which sends e-mail notices whenever there is a new article or blog post about a specified topic. This tool helps keep the reporter updated on what other people are writing about with relevant keywords to his or her beat. The alerts can be e-mailed as they become available, once-a-day, or once-a-week. The reporter can have as many alerts as needed by simply selecting relevant keywords. While these alerts likely won't break news to the reporter, it will help the journalist know what other people are writing about and possibly bring a new angle to their attention. Receiving these alerts on a daily basis will help ensure the reporter knows what is going on and never misses a relevant article, website update, or blog post.

Tool #5 – Delicious

Delicious is a social bookmarking website that allows the user to tag a webpage or blog with certain keywords. The tags are then stored under the respective username. The reporter can then go back and filter those tags by keyword. If the reporter wants to write an article on a certain topic, they can quickly search for all of the articles they had tagged on the topic. A user can also share these tags with other users and this feature allows potential readers to find what type of articles and websites the reporter visits and reads. It's also easy to search for certain keywords, providing a great researching tool for reporters to uncover relevant articles.

Conclusion

There were five technologies and websites listed above that should be in every journalist's toolbox. The digital camera has become essential for journalists to capture necessary stills for an article or catch some breaking news story. The RSS feed reader and Google Alerts enables the reporter to stay up to date on interested topics or on their favorite websites and blogs. Social networking sites allow the user to find sources, get story ideas, and foster relationships with readers hopefully increasing the likelihood they'll visit the reporter's site to read a new article. Delicious acts as an online folder to store articles, blog entries, and websites while doing research for an article and a tool to search for useful webpages. And with that, those are the five things that should be in every journalist's digital toolbox.