J-Learning

you're how-to site for community journalism.

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Igniting news ideas that work

follow us:

1. PLAN IT!

2. BUILD IT!

3. PRESENT IT!

4. PROMOTE IT!

Networked Journalism: What Works

Three years ago, J-Lab funded nine pilot projects that invited eight newspapers and one public radio station to partner with news start-ups in their communities.Results are in!

View them here.

Dive Into J-Learning

- Hiring a designer/ developer
- Searchable Community Database
- Tracking your users

- Sales, Fundraising or E-Commerce
- Buying hardware and software
- Cool Tools

How-To's Around the Web

Creating Infographics for Free
InfoGraphicsArchive lists their favorite, free sites and software that help users build infographics and charts.

Must-Have Social Media
GeekWire discusses the ten best tools for startups that are looking to solidify and strengthen their social media.

Digital Tools to Know About
CNN lists the 50 best apps, websites and social networks creating the most buzz that you should know about.

Check out more outside resources.

Knight Community News Network

Leverage your Social Media
Engage with your community, listen and monitor the conversation and plan outreach campaigns around news events, real world meet-ups and breaking stories with our learning module.

Outside-the-box Community Engagement
Poynter explains how Colorado media has adapted in the five years since the Rocky Mountain News folded.

The Freebies List
A list of 73 free or inexpensive resources that you can use in reporting, multimedia storytelling and managing Web sites.

About J-Learning

J-Learning offers tips and tools for using hardware and software to create community news sites.The Knight Community News Network is a sister site to help journalists build skills for community news sites.They are produced by J-Lab.
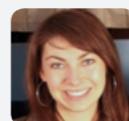
About J-Lab

J-Lab is a journalism catalyst that funds new approaches to journalism, researches best practices and shares practical insights gained from years of working with news creators and news gatherers.

J-Lab Newsletter

J-Flash, our e-newsletter, is packed full of information you need to know and learning opportunities.

Sign Up Today

Spotlight on:

DC Startup Forum
See Tech Cocktail co-founder Jen Consalvo at American University, Feb. 20, 8pm.

ONA 2012
Read about J-Lab's session, "Entrepreneuring 4.0," at the 2012 ONA conference.

Launching a Nonprofit News Site
Want to launch a nonprofit news site? Here's a step-by-step guide to jump start your efforts.

Engaging Audiences
This June 2012 survey, funded by the McCormick Foundation, reports on how "digital-first" news sites are engaging their audiences.

J-Learning is an initiative of J-Lab: The Institute for Interactice Journalism. J-Lab is an incubator for innovative, participatory news experiments and is a center of American University's School of Communication in Washington, DC. J-Learning was created by support from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

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- Blogs

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- Tracking Your Users
- Law and Ethics

Domain Names
Learn the basics on domain names

Writing a Mission Statement
Questions to ask before creating a mission statement

Choosing a Web Host
It used to be that you'd buy a domain one place, then have to decide on a Web host. Not anymore.

Knowing When You Need to Outsource
Some aspects of developing your website might benefit from an extra set of hands or a professional's expertise.

News Site in a Box
How to launch a community news site with free and easy tools.

Setting Milestones
Once you've crafted a mission statement, it's time to make a list of milestones or goals for your site.

Choosing a Domain Name
When you create a website, it's not enough to have a good name. You also need a good domain.

What to Shop For
There are many reliable Web hosting companies to choose from. So what separates one from another?

Writing an RFP or Specification
Whether or not you plan to hire outside professionals to designyour site, it's a good idea to write a RFP outlining the specific capabilities you want.

Quick, easy and powerful Web publishing
So you want to be a Web publisher? Thankfully, today's technology makes it easy for anyone to jump in and produce a content Web site with a professional look and performance.

Identify Your Audience
Your site is going to be far more effective if it understands and targets its audience.

Registering a Domain
If you want to find out whether the domain you want is available, don't just type your preferred name into a web browser. Even if no website appears, the domain name may already be taken.

Other Considerations
Cost isn't the only consideration when it comes to choosing a Web host. Here are some other factors that you should weigh before you make your decision.

Finding Contractors
Now, you're looking for someone to bid on your well-crafted RFP. Where should you look?

How to build a simple website using free services
There are dozens, yes dozens, of free website builders available today.

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What You Need in a Computer System (Mac or PC)
A start-up web publisher faces many computing hardware choices.

Basic HTML
HTML is the language that web browsers and web servers use to display web pages.

Web Standards for Publishing Venues
After more than a decade's experience and several significant studies about how people read web pages, web designers have developed several tips for good site design.

Introducing Databases
Unless you have some way to manage your content, a large site quickly becomes unmanageable. Databases are key to managing that growth.

Keeping Track of Files
As your site matures, the amount of content will grow. And grow. And grow even more. You'll have to consider how you'll archive your material and how to best organize your long-term production to maximize efficiency.

Using Adobe Dreamweaver
Many different programs let you create and edit web pages.

Can You Upgrade or Do You Need a New Machine?
For less computer-intensive tasks, consider upgrading an older machine.

Choosing Colors
The roots of a successful Web design come from the color choices you make.

Planning Your Database Tables
As a news site, you might want to keep a database of past stories for your readers.

Creating an HTML page
Now that you have defined a site, you should create a web page to upload as a test.

Making Backups
It's easy to overlook the task of regularly backing up your data.

CSS: Cascading Style Sheets
Cascading Style Sheets — even the name sounds a little intimidating, like perhaps you're falling down a steep slope.

Creating Forms
If you want to give your readers the ability to interact with your site - to send information to it rather than simply receive information from it - you'll need to move beyond basic HTML.

Logos
Logo design is critical for more than just your website

Database Applications
If your site runs on open-source software, it's likely to have one of two database applications available: MySQL or PostgreSQL.

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How to Record Audio for the Web
Recording audio isn't rocket science, but you do need to pay attention to where you are choosing to record.

Understanding Blogs
Blogs, or web logs, are hot these days — among journalists, citizens, even CEOs.

How to Take Pictures for Online Use
Whenever you can, take photographs with a digital still camera, as opposed to a digital video camera or a regular camera.

How to Shoot Video for the Web
As you set about shooting video, you may want to consider hiring an expert if you don't already have one in-house.

Getting Familiar with SWiSHmax
Macromedia Flash is the weapon of choice for serious interactive animators, but the outstanding application SWiSHmax may be a better choice for those who need to get the job done with a minimum of fuss

Visualizing Data
If you've worked with computers for any length of time, you know how easy it is to collect data, and yet how hard it can be to make the best use of that data.

Digitizing Audio
Digital sound is created by a process called "sampling."

Writing and Editing a Blog
Writing a blog isn't rocket science, but it also may not be quite as easy as it looks. A successful blog's conversational style either comes naturally or it doesn't.

Getting Familiar with Web Graphics
Only two image formats — GIFs and JPEGs — can be used completely safely on the web.

Using Adobe Premiere
In the next sections, you will get a look at digitizing and editing video using Adobe Premiere Pro, which includes most of the editing tools you need and has good integration with digital video — the best type of video for the web.

Forums and Feedback
Your website is not only a tool allowing you to communicate with your readers, it's also a good way to allow your readers to communicate with you and with one another.

Creating a Basic SWiSHmax Animation
Begin experimenting with SWiSHmax by creating a simple animation.

Editing Audio
It's a good idea to save a backup of the original file so that you can revert to it if needed. It is also a good idea to save a couple of copies of your file.

Chosing Blog Software
There are many software options available for blogging. First, you must determine where the blog should live: Hosted or Installed.

Preparing Images and Photos for the Web
Here are some guidelines for making your images download quickly and display correctly.

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Advertising Your Site
Just because you've built a wonderful new website doesn't mean visitors will automatically find it.

Putting Ads on Your Site
Now that you're an Internet publisher, you may look at advertising in an entirely different light from when you were just an Internet user.

Why Traffic Matters
It's critical that you start tracking your visitors at launch so that you can gauge your site's growth.

Deep Linking
It's common practice nowadays, with aggregation sites popping up all over the web to direct traffic to other sites.

Viral Marketing
What we once called "word of mouth" has given rise to something known as "viral marketing."

Understanding Traffic
The most widely used metrics for measuring traffic to your site involve counting page views, visits and unique visitors.

Copyright and Attribution
Copyright is a tricky idea, and there are many over-arching legal battles going on relating to copyright and the Internet.

Identifying Revenue and Sales Opportunities
As you plan for the launch of your site, you should think about how you are going to keep it going once it gets off the ground.

Using Twitter for Promotion and Community
Twitter, the leading service for microblogging, was quickly adopted by dozens - then hundreds - of news outlets in 2008.

RSS Feeds
RSS is an efficient way to get information quickly from the web.

Traffic Software
Thankfully, technology has come a long way with regard to online traffic reporting. It's no longer necessary to run log files through special software to analyze your traffic.

Selling Advertising
dvertising is one of the most common ways to raise money. To sell ads, however, you have to identify potential advertisers, establish prices, and establish guidelines for content.

Legal Issues for Online Publishers
Terms of use, privacy, choice of legal venues and other legal details a new online publisher should consider.

Getting and Giving Links
Current thinking on when to provide links recommends adding as many outside links as are appropriate for the content you're providing.

Online Libel Issues
Quality publications build solid reputations on competent factual reporting and sage editorials.

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Tutorials for Coding
Learning how to code can be daunting. GCFLearnFree.org gives you three websites that will give you the "how-to", and Lisa Williams points out the best tutorials and resources for journalists looking to learn more about coding here

Must-Have Social Media
GeekWire discusses the ten best tools for startups that are looking to solidify and strengthen their social media.

CMS Platforms for Hyperlocal
Street Fight talks about seven CMS platforms tailored to hyperlocal news websites.

Piktochart
A website that helps users create and edit infographics. For basic themes and casual users, the site is free, but access to more themes and customization costs only $29 a month.

Infogr.am
A free website that features infographic and chart templates that you can use to present your data.

Easel.ly
One of the newer infographic template sites, it can be used to make infographics using the "vhemes," or visual themes provided.

Excel Basics for Journalists
For those with little experience using Excel in their reporting, this article by Poynter helps break down the best ways for journalists to use spreadsheets.

Tumblr Tips for News Outlets
Journalism.co.uk shares some of their best tips from pros for using Tumblr to promote your website.

Online Journalism Resources
A general list of online resources and examples from MediaTrope featuring categories such as Organizing, Reporting Online and Interactive Platforms.

Key Lessons for Startups
The Online Journalism Review discusses the key things to remember for hyperlocal websites.

Cool Tools
22 tools and apps every j-student should know about.

Reading Resources
View Mark Briggs' blog on the changing realm of journalism and how to be a news entrepreneur in it.

Advice for Media Entrepreneurs
Huffington Post co-founder Ken Lerer gives his top lessons for launching your own media business.

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