

“CENTRAL COLLECTION”: THE PEOPLE’S NEWS EXCHANGE

How Broadcast News Can Enable Citizen Journalism

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INTRODUCTION

The Internet is hammering broadcast news. It offers complete flexibility, choice and control over the content consumed. It has turned what were once passive viewers into active seekers of information. And, it has even created a new kind of journalism – citizen journalism – whereby citizens play an active role in the collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating news and information.

While the Internet has grown in large part due to active participation, broadcast news, has yet to do so. It is still rigid in both its structure and content. There is only one choice – take it or leave it. Unfortunately, more viewers are choosing to *leave it*. And as more viewers leave it, in some cases, broadcast news is even retreating, as some news bureaus are consolidating.

Rather than lose share to the Internet and digital technology, broadcast news must embrace it on two levels: the technology itself and consumers evolving viewer habits. As new, related technologies emerge broadcasters have to be in the “batters box.” Broadcast news has a unique opportunity to do so by empowering citizen journalism at a grass-roots level, and giving their viewers a new-found sense of participation in their news. With the ubiquity of digital recorders, cameras and cell phones, any consumer can actively participate in their news by simply *being at the right place at the right time*.

Central collection is the media workflow and technological infrastructure that gives citizen journalists access to contribute to their local television stations. On the consumer side, it exploits the ubiquity of digital cameras and video recorders, and their desire to be heard. And for newsrooms, central collection consolidates the collection and verification of such files without a significant drain on already stressed budgets and staff resources. It provides newsrooms with a fresh pipeline of stories and leads by creating a searchable database of stories, with pictures, videos and contextual information. It’s a win for both sides. Local news rooms can get an abundance of content at minimal cost, and audiences tune into what they believe is more relevant news – at the local, community level.

Central collection is a simple means for broadcast news to tap into the popularity of citizen journalism, increase their story pool, and re-engage their viewers.

OVERVIEW

This paper will explore the strengths and the challenges faced by today’s broadcast news programs, discuss how broadcast media combined with everyday digital technology can produce a more engaging broadcast news program, and describe the benefits of central collection and how it works.

THE CHALLENGES FACING BROADCAST NEWS

Broadcast news is losing viewers. It lacks the flexibility, variety and control that viewers find so convenient on the Internet. And, when directly comparing the attributes of broadcast news to the Internet, it seems that broadcast news is at a distinct disadvantage.

Broadcast news is limited in schedule

The news is only available 3-4 times per day. Viewers must tune in at a specific time or miss out entirely. The Internet, on the other hand, is twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, allowing consumers access at their leisure. But, this is the nature of the medium. It is what it is, so quality of content and format must compensate for what is lacking in flexibility.

Quality of Content

As to be expected, there is a tremendous amount of duplication and homogeneity between the stations. This is in part due to consolidation among owned-and-operated affiliates that share staff. Sometimes the same personnel will cover the same story for two different networks that share a parent company.¹ (WGA, July 2007)

Also negatively affecting the quality of content is the trend toward sensationalist stories that require little leg work, like a fire, drug bust or the ever popular celebrity mishap. A reporter and photographer, sometimes the same person doing both, can go to scene, take some

footage, interview a law enforcement figure – and they are done. No extensive research or digging is required. It is an inexpensive means to a sensational story. Unfortunately, the end-result for the viewer is to flip channels and see the same image, over and over again.

Lack of Choice

The viewer has only one choice when it comes to broadcast news: take it or leave it. And when it seems like every station is featuring the same thing, and the quality of news content is perceived to be lacking, then the viewer will leave the medium entirely.

Business Limitations

“Corporate pressures to cut costs are negatively impacting their ability to bring public, objective, high quality news” Chris Albers, WGA East President. This is a self-fulfilling prophecy. Unfortunately, lower ratings lead to less advertising revenue, which leads to smaller budgets for qualified staff to research and write better stories, which in turn leads to lower quality content. It is a vicious cycle, and it’s happening!

Limited, if any, outlet for citizen journalists

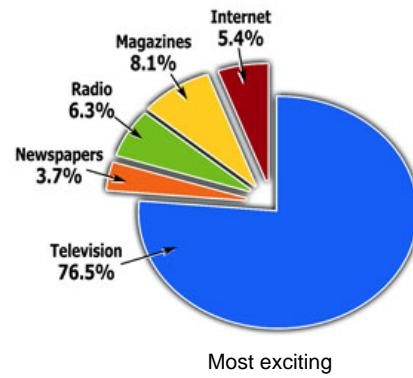
While broadcast news’ complimentary web-sites may offer group blogs, and some news programs ask for viewers to e-mail comments, broadcast news is still an incredibly passive experience. Viewers are spoon-fed news stories. They do not participate and they do not contribute. They have no vested interest in the content. On the other hand, the explosion of websites like TMZ.com and YouTube prove that consumers want an outlet. As a matter of fact, TMZ now has television show based on the website. The Internet is driving TV!

BROADCAST NEWS STRENGTHS: IT IS STILL THE PREFERRED MEDIUM!

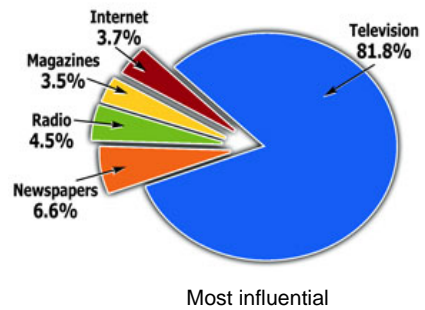
Despite all of the challenges that are weakening television’s base, make no mistake, television is still the strongest medium out there. Television and broadcast news still enjoy significantly more credibility and authority than any other medium. It is still the primary source for information on local events, weather, traffic and sports. Simply saying, “I saw it on TV” still carries more weight than “I read it on the Internet.”

According to a Nielsen Media Research Comparison Study, television is the most exciting, influential and persuasive medium:

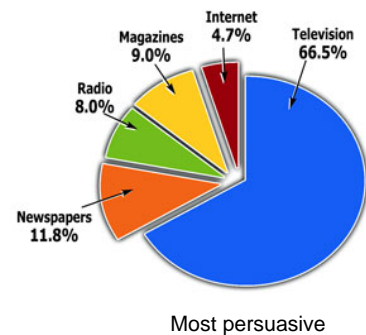
Broadcast television is cited by more adults as their *primary news source, and as their primary source for local weather, traffic and sports news.* Asked which medium is the most involved in the local community, broadcast television was also the No.1 choice.²



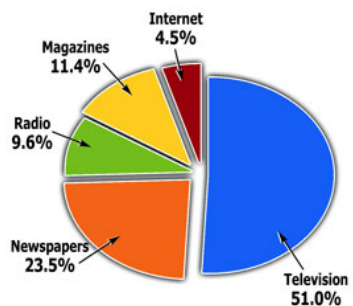
- Most exciting: 76.5% of adults 18+ chose television as the most exciting medium over all other media. The Internet was only 5.4%.²



- Most influential: 81.1% of adults 18+ chose television as the most influential medium over all other media.²



- Most persuasive: 66.5% of adults 18+ chose television as the most persuasive medium over all other media.²



Most authoritative

- Most authoritative: 51% of adults 18+ chose television as the most authoritative medium.²

Television is clearly still the leader. And, broadcast news can maintain and even build on its position of strength by promoting and including citizen journalism in its line-up. “If news organizations don’t embrace this, it will embrace them, and they’ll become less and less relevant,” says Michael Tippet founder of NowPublic.com. “Citizen journalism is not the future, it’s the present.” When a story grabs hold and becomes very popular online, it will eventually appear on broadcast news.

Wainhouse Research believes that there is growing momentum for new collaboration services in enterprise social networks or news sites. “In the hosted market, we are most enthusiastic about enterprise social networks, which hold the promise of integrating asynchronous (non real-time) and synchronous (real-time) collaboration. As an example, a news portal might provide news story collaboration, audio, video or text membership availability, membership grading and automatic connection to members to share information according to the state of availability.”³

Broadcast news has the unique opportunity to take news collaboration and citizen journalism further – to make them better. Its reputation for accuracy and fact checking will serve to improve them. Currently, the Internet is the only outlet for citizen journalists and it is a bit like the Wild, Wild West. No one knows for sure who is posting what information, what their intentions are, or even how accurate their information is. There are no controls, no checks and balances. But broadcast news has researching and fact checking processes and people in place. Broadcast news’ goal (ideally) is objectivity and accuracy, which is why it enjoys such credibility and authority. By setting up workflow and processes to better integrate citizen journalists today, broadcast news will not only maintain its leadership position, it will stem further losses to the Internet.

Combing the two – citizen journalism and broadcast news – will serve to improve both. Citizen journalism, as seen on broadcast news, can now be trusted for accuracy and credibility. Broadcast news, with the addition of stories contributed by citizen journalists, provides more relevant, engaging stories for their viewers at a lower cost. After all, if citizens take the time and effort to provide a story, you can bet it’s important to them.

CENTRAL COLLECTION

Central collection is the technology and workflow by which broadcast newsrooms can include citizen journalists. It utilizes every day, ubiquitous technology – a digital camera or recorder which can be found on most cell phones, the Internet. The citizen journalist simply posts his story, with pictures and or videos, to his favorite local station’s central collection site.

On the station side, a central collection sites evolves into a tagged, searchable repository of news content and media collected from disparate sources to one secure location. The newsroom creates a secure website, where citizen journalists can post their stories. During the upload process, users are asked to categorize their story and provide some information. Categories can include: education, politics, sports, weather, children, fund raisers, traffic, health, special interest, breaking news, etc. As time goes by, it creates a searchable database of stories that reporters can reference whenever they need.

Central collection Workflow: How it works

The following diagram charts the process by which central collection works, from a citizen journalist recording an event, to registering with a station’s central collection site, to seeing it on the news.

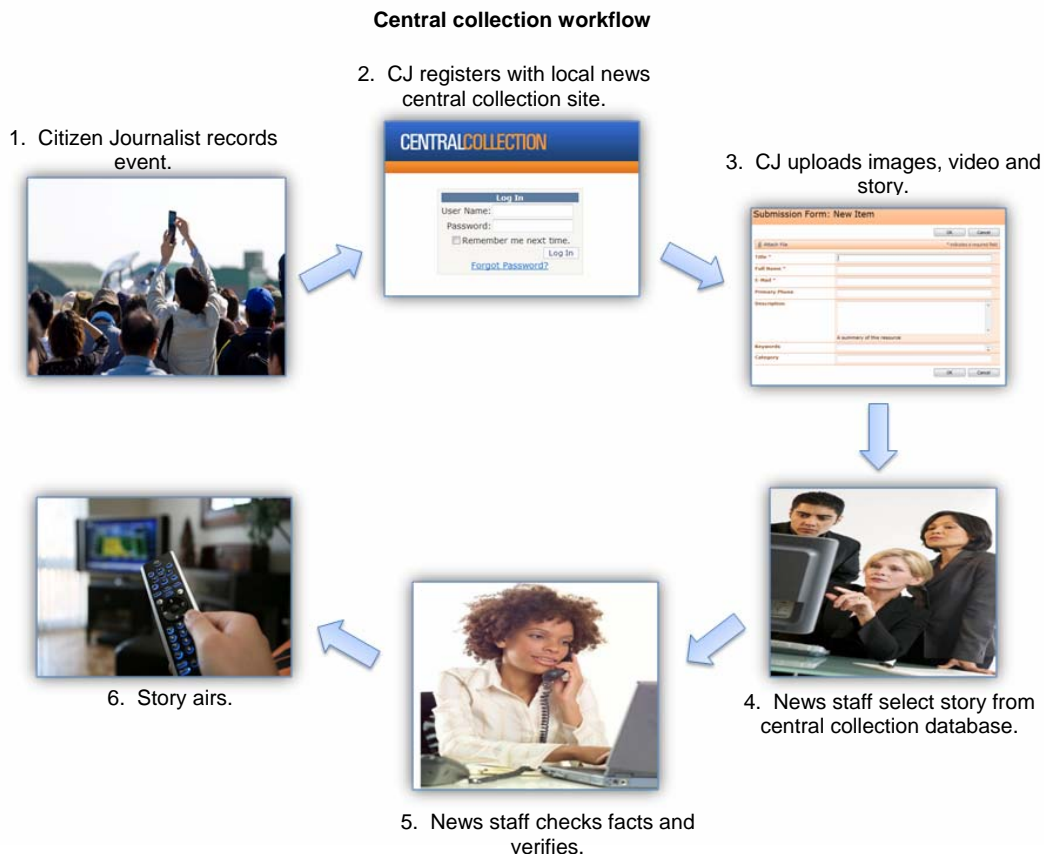
1. Joe Q. Citizen records an event with his digital camera.
2. Joe Q. Citizen logs onto his favorite station’s central collection site.
3. He is prompted to:
 - Register -- Provide contact information, which is necessary to verify the source, validate the story and confirm receipt.
 - Upload his file
 - Write a brief description
 - Tag the content according to subject matter: (weather, human interest, education, sports, health, traffic, politics)
 - Agree to any legal waivers the station would like to (or not to) institute

4. central collection worksite runs anti-virus scan before accepting the files
5. central collection sends a confirmation to Joe Q. Citizen
6. Administrator receives notification of a new posting. Administrator can choose when to view the files.
7. As more citizens post stories, a repository of stories is built, that newsroom staff members can reference and search through at their convenience.
8. Administrator selects a story.
9. Based on the information provided during the registration and upload, the station administrator or journalist checks facts and verifies the story.
10. Story airs on the local news.
11. Joe Q. Citizen tunes into the news, and tells all of his friends that it was *his* story.

enhances their status and the gives a sense of importance to their contribution. There are two ways for a station to consider registration. On the one hand, requiring a citizen journalist to register will limit pranksters and ensure that a story and source can be verified. On the other hand, it will discourage those journalists that prefer anonymity. But, the beauty of an on-demand central collection site, is that registration, and any other requirements for that matter, can be customized in minutes. So the validation process for submission can change with the needs of the newsrooms.

Central collection's ingenuity is its simplicity. Central collection relies on everyday, familiar technologies – the Internet and a cell phone. There is no learning curve or training required on either end. For citizen journalists, they just need a desire to contribute to the news. For television stations, anyone who can search and sort can use the site. Furthermore, the ability to customize is built into the central collection site's infrastructure, so changes to the site are not costly. Last and most important is out-of-pocket cost – or lack thereof. An on-demand central collection site can be launched for as little as \$100 per month.

Registration for Citizen Journalists is left to the discretion of the station. Citizen journalists who register are given the title, *citizen news reporter*, which



CONCLUSION

Combining the leadership position of broadcast news, with the ubiquity and the flexibility of the Internet will provide news rooms with a continual and fresh source of story leads. It will facilitate citizen journalism and extend the reach of limited staff to provide news that is relevant and important to the local viewer.

Central collection affects both viewers and news staff. It empowers local viewers, also known as citizen journalists, to use their everyday technologies, their cell phones and their Internet connection, to contribute content to their local news – to have a say in what is deemed important and newsworthy. For local viewers, it provides an opportunity for them to take control and ownership over their news. For newsrooms, it provides a database of new stories with images and sources, so researchers and reporters have a bank of fresh stories, right at their fingertips. In so doing, local news will offer choice and more relevance to their local communities, while revitalizing their viewer base.

Central collection works because it combines the strengths of both media, the Internet and Television, and embraces consumers desire to participate. As the Internet becomes more popular and powerful, the bar will continue to rise and broadcasters will be *expected* to provide more participation and choice. Furthermore, as advances in wireless, hand-held technologies and connectivity continue, anyone will have the means to document a current event. Anyone can become a citizen journalist. Without incurring extensive costs or draining existing resources, central collection is a simple means for broadcasters to not only expand their pool of stories, but to empower citizen journalists. In so doing, they will remain relevant and better serve their local audiences.

Sources:

1. WGA, *East, Broadcast News writers Speak About News Quality*, July 2007
2. Nielsen Media Research Custom Survey 2006, *Media Comparison Study Commissioned by Television Bureau of Advertising*
3. Wainhouse Research on Worldwide Unified Communications Services Forecast, November 27, 2007

Alexandra Ontra, Author

Alexandra Ontra is Co-founder and President of Secure Worksites which owns and operates a collection of on-demand Internet worksites: [PPTshare](#), [MediaShare3000](#), [LexLibrary](#), [eDealBook](#), [NoMoreFTP](#) & [CentralCollection.net](#). For the past 10 years, Alexandra has provided both sales & marketing and technology solutions for blue chip broadcast companies such as: ABC National Television Sales, CBS, Fox Broadcasting, NBC & Telemundo Sales & Marketing, Warner Bros., Scripps Networks, BET, Showtime, and Tribune Entertainment.

Louis Libin, Contributor

Louis Libin serves on the advisory board of Secure Worksites. He is founder and CEO of Broad-Comm, Inc. a consulting group specializing in advanced television broadcast, interactive TV, Internet Protocol and wireless communications. Mr. Libin was Chief Technology Officer for NBC, and was responsible for all business and technical matters for satellite, wireless and communication issues for General Electric and NBC. Mr. Libin has also represented the United States on satellite and transmission issues at the International Telecommunications Union (the ITU) in Geneva, and served as the technical advisor to the US Olympics in Salt Lake City. Mr. Libin currently serves on the boards of i2Telecom, Andrea Electronics Corp. and the Friends of Jerusalem College of Technology.