theNEW news

JOURNALISM WE WANT AND NEED

A special report by Community Media Workshop
commissioned by The Chicago Community Trust

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Introduction

Economic pressures on one hand and continuing democratization of news on the other have already changed the news picture in Chicago, as elsewhere in the U.S. The *Chicago Tribune* and Chicago *Sun-Times* are in bankruptcy, and local broadcast news programs also face economic pressures. Meanwhile, it seems every week brings a new local news entrepreneur from Gapers Block to Beachwood Reporter to Chi-Town Daily News to Windy Citizen to The Printed Blog.

In response to these changes, the Knight Foundation is actively supporting a national effort to explore innovations in how information, especially at the local community level, is collected and disseminated to ensure that people find the information they need to make informed decisions about their community's future. The Chicago Community Trust is fortunate to have been selected as a partner working with the Knight Foundation in this effort through the Knight Community Information Challenge. For 94 years, the Trust has united donors to create charitable resources that respond to the changing needs of our community—meeting basic needs, enriching lives and encouraging innovative ways to improve our neighborhoods and communities.

Understanding how online information and communications are meeting, or not, the needs of the community is crucial to the Trust's project supported by the Knight Foundation. To this end, the Trust commissioned the Community Media Workshop to produce *The New News: Journalism We Want and Need*. We believe this report is a first of its kind resource offering an inventory and assessment of local news coverage for the region by utilizing the interactive power of the internet. Essays in this report also provide insightful perspectives on the opportunities and challenges.

We hope you find the report informative and instructive for your work. We are truly grateful to the staff of the Community Media Workshop and members of the advisory committee for making this unprecedented report possible.

Terry Mazany
President and Chief Executive Officer
The Chicago Community Trust

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Introduction to The NEW News

All good journalists learn that—alongside the basic questions *who, what, when, where, why*, and *how*—to craft a good story, they must answer the all-important sixth W: *So What*? We hope that after reviewing *The New News: Journalism We Want and Need* readers will agree that, in addition to discussing the price tag and financing plan for local news coverage, this is a good time to look at the *so what*— in other words, to look critically at and set goals for the kind of local news coverage we want for the region.

While we've heard much about the struggle of existing news outlets with micropayments, subscription models, and other aspects of news economics, there's been little or no conversation about how the emergence of local online news publications can best ensure our need for quality local news coverage. What's more, it is not a foregone conclusion that journalists at online publications will do a better job than their print and broadcast metro news colleagues.

The space available to produce local news at our traditional print and broadcast news outlets is shrinking. That shrinkage is producing exciting opportunities for the growth of local online news. The good news is: everyone from experts to everyday people identify local news as a crucial need of democracy. At the request of The Chicago Community Trust, Community Media Workshop framed this report on present conditions and trends for Chicago news media and future prospects for local news as a provisional response to the questions: "In an online world, what does local news look like—and what do we want it to look like?"

Community Media Workshop has always viewed its mission as in part an attempt to insure that the story of Chicago not be told as a "tale of two cities…the glorious downtown, the skyline, the glitz, and glamour …and the other Chicago, where most residents live, where schools and little else work as well as they should." We've worked to promote more nuanced, better contexted and sourced local news in Chicago communities. We train nonprofit communicators to tell their stories through the news as well as through other channels (newsletters, public access cable, and in recent years, social media) since our inception in 1989. In the past we have prepared reports on topics such as an evaluation of the success of Local School Councils and the impact of community policing on Chicago, so this report joins a series of occasional studies on topics of overriding interest to the city and region.

The Workshop prepared *The New News* not as an outside observer but as a participant. This report draws on another initiative we've been undertaking at the same time, to produce a concept of our own for a new local online news site. Mark Miller and Bob Yovovich, consultants to the Workshop, led that effort. Material they developed for that concept paper has been used in this report, as well. We also benefited from the services of an Advisory Committee convened by The Chicago Community Trust, which met twice—once as we got underway to discuss our approach, and once at the end, to hear a preliminary presentation of our findings. We'd like to thank the members of the committee for their input both at and in between these meetings (a full list of committee members is located in the Acknowledgements).

This report comes at a moment of change and opportunity, one we should take advantage of to chart a new course for better local news. It's organized as responses to three key questions:

- **Chapter 1: How did we get here?** We begin with a brief overview of some of the facts, figures and indicators that underlie the economic changes in the news business. While this section highlights recent declines in the news business' economics, it also finds continuity rather than disruption in the state of how news has been covering community issues. Based on word counts of basic issues, coverage of local news in our two prominent daily newspapers has dropped by two-thirds over the past decade.

   Key finding: Overall, local news coverage has been declining for some time and online local news publications, albeit in their nascent stages, have not yet filled the gap.

- **Chapter 2: Who's doing what online?** Using our experience garnered over more than a decade of compiling lists of Chicago-area news outlets and personnel for the annual *Getting On Air, Online, & Into Print* news media directory, we have compiled and ranked a set of 60 online news publications that are providing local news coverage. (Overall, we discovered almost 200 online news sites, blogs or e-newsletters serving the Chicago region. Some 90 of these responded to our survey and their rankings can be found in the Web version of this report: www.communitymediaworkshop.org/newnews.) Because most of these sites remain small relative to national sites with audiences in the hundreds of thousands or more, and because the Internet works best at scales far larger than those at which many of these sites operate, the task has been challenging and, of course, is open to many interpretations. We've attempted to provide a list of Chicago online news publications that are diverse in their audience, staffing, business, and editorial models but share a commitment to informing us and entertaining us with stories about our city and region.

   Key finding: The Workshop assembled a list of local online news publications that are leading the way in covering Chicago, and developed a process for identifying them.

- **Chapter 3: What kind of information do we "want and need?"** Influenced by the approach of the Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities in a Democracy, we sought to arrive at a user-oriented critique of local online news coverage. We held focus groups with 33 leaders of nonprofits from across the region including performing arts organizations, social-service agencies and advocacy groups, to gauge their perceptions about the state and of local news coverage and vision for a better future.

The good news is: everyone from experts to everyday people identify local news as a crucial need of democracy.

Key finding: Leaders of groups that serve the community identified three characteristics of news they value: it should be *vetted* (edited for accuracy and reflective of prevailing community values; biases are expected but transparency about those biases is important); *selected* (reducing information search costs), and should portray the *"big picture"* of the most relevant and timely issues and events affecting the region, framing one conversation to inform a common agenda and vision of the most urgent local issues and opportunities.

Interspersed within and between these sections are six articles by members of the advisory committee, focusing on three key areas: policy, innovation, and business practice. Rather than providing additional key findings, these articles seek to shed light on trends relevant to local news coverage, especially online news publications.

In his introduction to *Hello Sweetheart, Get Me Rewrite* (a well-known memoir about the heart of Chicago's storied journalism, the now-defunct City News Bureau), Mike Royko recalls the Bureau's prime directive: "If your mother says she loves you—check it out!"[1] This report is an effort to check out what's really going on with local news coverage, and more importantly, to envision the kind of journalism 21st century Chicagoans actually want and need in order to build strong communities and a strong region.

1 Dornfeld, A.A., *Hello Sweetheart, Get Me Rewrite: The Story of the City News Bureau of Chicago* (Chicago: Academy Chicago Publishers, 1983)

The future of journalism is a policy issue

BY CHARLES BENTON

With the newspaper industry reeling from reduced advertising revenues, consumers migrating to new news outlets, and burdensome debt, many are asking if policymakers should step in to save journalism.

Media ownership consolidation hurts good journalism

"In many towns and cities, the newspaper is an endangered species." With these words on November 13, 2007, Kevin Martin, then-Federal Communications Commission chairman, proposed sweeping changes to the nation's media ownership rules.

Seventy-five years ago, Congress created the FCC to regulate the nation's electronic communications systems—telephones and radio followed by television, cable, satellite, and later, the Internet. Newspapers did not fall under the FCC's jurisdiction, but in 1975, the Commission adopted rules banning the ownership of a television or radio station by the owner of a newspaper in the same local community. The aim of this cross-ownership ban was to prevent one voice, one corporate owner, from having too much control over the flow of information in a community.

Martin changed the rules, arguing that newspapers' ownership of local TV or radio stations could restore these companies to financial health. "If we believe that newspaper journalism plays a unique role in the functioning of our democracy, then we cannot turn a blind eye to the financial condition in which these companies find themselves," he wrote. Although the presidential election of 2008 pushed Martin off the national stage, the debate over his controversial rules change continues.

Research shows that mergers between newspapers and TV outlets are not a solution for the crisis of newspapers or the problems of journalism. Fordham University's Mark Cooper finds that large multimedia chains and cross-owned properties are having just as much trouble as stand-alone entities, and mergers have tended to reduce the quality of journalism, especially investigative journalism. (www.fordham.edu/ images/undergraduate/communications/ the%20future%20of%20journalism-huff.pdf)

Cooper's findings will prove important over the next year as President Barack Obama picks a new FCC chairman and commissioners. In mid-April, a federal court agreed to delay ruling on challenges to Martin's loosening of the newspaper-broadcast cross-ownership ban until a newly-constituted FCC can take another look at it. The public will again get an opportunity to weigh in on the issue and let policymakers know how much concentration of media ownership is acceptable in their communities.

Antitrust "flexibility" sought to create new business models

Recognizing the financial problems facing the newspaper industry, Congress, too, is taking a look at journalism. In April, a House committee held on a hearing on "A New Age for Newspapers: Diversity of Voices, Competition and the Internet."

There, Brian Tierney, CEO of Philadelphia Newspapers, said newspaper publishers need "flexibility" to explore new business models. He asked that antitrust regulators not preclude publishers from "experimenting with innovative content distribution and cost savings arrangements." He called for Congress to pass legislation quickly to provide expedited Department of Justice review of newspaper transactions that reduce costs and achieve other efficiencies, as well as limited antitrust relief for newspapers to discuss and experiment with new, more sustainable business models and strategies.

Department of Justice antitrust official Carl Shapiro testified that newspapers, however rare and financially weak, can adapt and ultimately conquer the threat posed by the Internet, and he indicated the Obama administration will oppose immunity from antitrust laws.

A national journalism strategy

At the April House hearing, Free Press, a public interest advocate organization, called for a national journalism strategy, a comprehensive effort across government, industry, and public stakeholders to work together to promote a vibrant news marketplace. Free Press insists that the strategy be based on five principles: 1) Protecting the First Amendment, 2) Producing quality coverage, 3) Providing adversarial perspectives, 4) Promoting public accountability, and 5) Prioritizing innovation.

Free Press Policy Director Ben Scott testified, "We have to recognize that the Internet can't solve all of journalism's problems because more than a third of the country is not connected to high-speed Internet today. Solutions that rely on technology will also have to deal with the digital divide."

Journalism has always been a policy issue

Free Press is drawing from a long history of governmental support for journalism. Early in U.S. history postal subsidies helped distribute newspapers. Printing contracts and paid publication of government notices also subsidized newspapers.

Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black wrote that the First Amendment "rests on the assumption that the widest possible dissemination of information from diverse and antagonistic sources is essential to the welfare of the public, that a free press is a condition of a free society." He argued for the right and necessity of the government to counteract private monopolistic control over the media.

More recently, Justice Anthony Kennedy argued that "assuring the public has access to a multiplicity of information sources is a governmental purpose of the highest order."

The question before use now, then, is, where do we want to end up? For it is through the far-seeing policy goals of the public sector that we can help guide the dynamic innovations and flexibility of the private sector. The government will play—as it always has—some role in the shape of media and journalism to come. It is up to us to enter that debate—with Congress the FCC, and any venue—to ensure we create the conditions necessary for a democratic and free press to flourish for years to come. Our democracy demands it.

Since 1981 Charles Benton has served as Chairman of the Benton Foundation. He now also serves as Chief Executive Officer. Charles has also had a long career in the media education and entertainment businesses, including Public Media Inc. He has led the Foundation through its evolution from a grantmaking to an operating foundation devoted generally to the field of communications. Charles has served on a number of federal boards including the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science, the Presidential Advisory Committee on Public Interest Obligations of Digital Television Broadcasters, and, currently, the Federal Communications Commission's Consumer Advisory Committee.

How did we get here?

Many observers of today's news business twists and turns start their historical overviews of the development of new online news publications in the late 15th century. That's when Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press, ushering in an era of print innovation that prefigured the changes wrought on our society by the advent of social media. Alberto Ibargüen, president and CEO of the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, in a widely published opinion piece, advanced succinctly the comparison between the rise of social media and the advent of print:

> Before Gutenberg, the monks copied illustrated manuscripts and were the keepers of information. Long after Gutenberg, during the Renaissance, society more or less figured out how to handle information. Today we are again living in those uncertain in-between years, when Gutenberg's technology broke the old rules and allowed something new called literacy.[1]

The economic trauma our major news outlets are experiencing—such as the bankruptcy of the *Chicago Tribune* and *Chicago Sun-Times*—masks some of the real trends affecting local news. These trends suggest online news publications are likely to supplement, not replace these news outlets. However, a lack of local news is a real concern online news publications may help alleviate.

Is there less local news?

 What constitutes local news may be hard to define, but we know it when we see it. However blurry the definition, newspaper audiences say it's what they value most highly and would miss most if their daily paper disappeared. In one recent poll by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 43 percent of respondents said it would hurt civic life "a lot" if their local newspaper closed; and 30 percent of those who felt it would hurt civic life a lot pointed to their reliance on their paper's local news as what they would miss.[2]

Journalists themselves increasingly point out that their ability to provide local news is their competitive advantage. A 2007 study by Harvard University's Nieman Foundation, *Is Local Journalism the Answer?* noted local news may be the key to giving hometown readers "reasons to go to their local newspaper, in print or online".[3]

While detailed content analysis was beyond the scope of our investigation, we attempted to get a rough sense of the quantity of local news coverage in our leading newspapers, The *Chicago Tribune* and *Chicago Sun-Times*. To do so, we selected some key terms we deemed likely to appear in coverage that exemplifies local

Data hounds and watchdogs:
How transparency can save democracy
BY GREG SANDERS

In January 2008, the *Chicago Tribune* scored a point for the fourth estate by documenting how "a building boom greased by millions of dollars in political donations to aldermen has remade the face of neighborhoods." The newspaper's methods were as striking as its findings: "The *Tribune* examined 5,700 zoning changes approved by the City Council over the last decade and recorded on sheets of paper clipped into binders in a City Hall office."

The zoning expose illustrates at least two important lessons. First, we need watchdogs to keep an eye on government and other large institutions. Next, there has to be a better way to do so.

Is the tradition of reporters sifting through stacks of paper really the best oversight mechanism we can manage? As long as we're using paper-based or obsolete digital record-keeping systems, maintaining the status quo amounts to withholding public information.

Government agencies at all levels withhold important information routinely, sometimes by design but more often by default; the typical response to information requests is not denial but inaction. (As Information Architect for the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, I sometimes fail to respond to data requests. More on that later.) In the digital age, however, the only legitimate reasons for withholding public information by government agencies are if the release could jeopardize public health or safety, personal privacy or business confidentiality.

Granting these exceptions, some 90 percent of the information held by government agencies could be safely released and cleansed to remove sensitive information, such as by masking certain data or aggregating raw data into summary statistics.
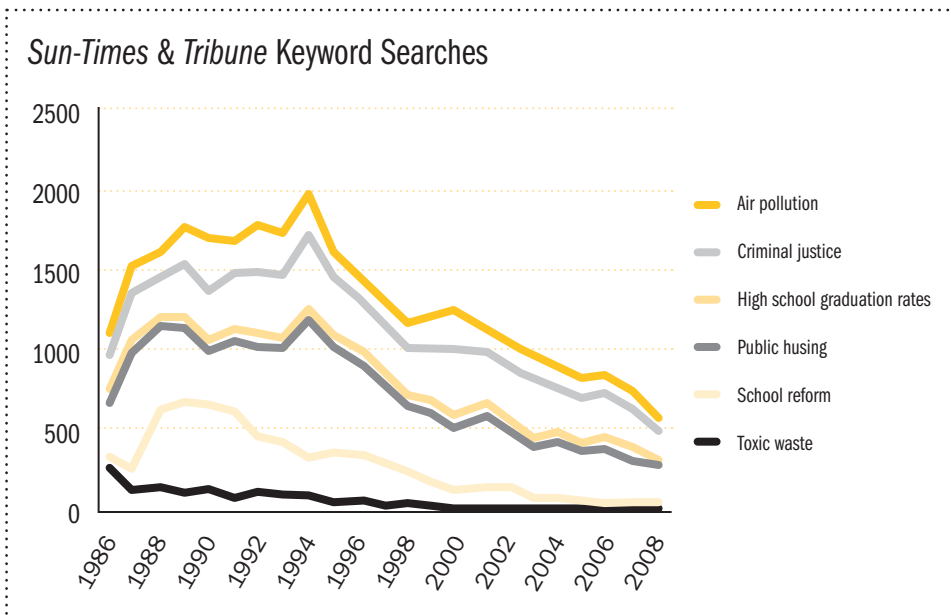
As for the *Chicago Tribune* and the city's zoning problem, a policy of releasing zoning variances immediately over the Internet in a searchable format would better serve both the city and

news. These terms were drawn from our experience in community development, health and education, among other areas, and focused on issues and challenges that have long faced Chicago and the region. We also selected as keywords several of Chicago's cultural institutions, which we reasoned would be likely to appear in stories about arts and culture and/or reviews of performances and other creative work. Keyword searches performed in March and April 2009 used the Newsbank archive and allowed us to examine how often the keywords appeared within a specific time frame. Searches included editorial, news, and feature stories in the two newspapers. We carried out the following keyword searches:

Air Pollution	Early Childhood Education	Ozone
Art Institute	Goodman Theater	Public Housing
Bribery	Health and Uninsured	Recycling
Charter Schools	High School	Regional Planning
Chicago Symphony	Graduation Rates	School Reform
Corruption	Homeless and Chicago	Senior Citizens
Criminal Justice	Infrastructure and Chicago	Toxic Waste
DCFS	Locally Grown Food	Vocational Education

Most of the results followed the same trend demonstrated for the six indicators in this chart:

Sun-Times & Tribune Keyword Searches

Legend: Air pollution, Criminal justice, High school graduation rates, Public husing, School reform, Toxic waste

We were unable to determine with the resources available to us what might have caused the apparent spike in local news coverage indicated by the keyword searches around 1994.

We also noted some exceptions to the steadily fewer appearances of most of our keyword terms thereafter. The exceptions included Corruption and Bribery, which showed significant increases in the number of stories containing these words.

Are stories about corruption and bribery, which are staples of Chicago and Illinois politics, driving other local news stories such as the ones we searched for out of the news? It's possible. Another interpretation is that as the newspapers have dropped some local news coverage, they have nonetheless kept the focus on their key government watchdog functions.

One important caveat on the keyword searches: they largely ignore context and make no adjustment for prominence within the newspaper (for example, a front page story received equal weight from the keyword search as one buried deep within one of the paper's sections). We attempted to control for this with searches for several of these keywords within the first paragraph of a news story, or lead.

the public. Would aldermen's mug shots have ended up on the front page if the details of their dealings had been made public from the start on an accessible Web site?

What's to be done? For the first time ever, we can answer that question confidently because Web technology makes true government transparency feasible.

As a general policy, I like this from Vivek Kundra, federal chief information officer: "We're going to be publishing government data and [operating on] a default assumption that information should be [available] to the people."

Public data can be broadcast in near-real time, archived in searchable databases, mapped, graphed and summarized online—as it can and should be. Even better, these processes can be automated so they don't place undue burdens on staff.

The initial investment for creating such systems is high. But can we afford to continue the operational paralysis that stymies government effectiveness?

In some ways, reforming government information systems is about saving government employees from ourselves. This is about public servants having the ability to act effectively on any given issue on any given day. Government agencies and civic organizations are paralyzed by a lack of situational awareness not occasionally, but continuously. Even government entities, the biggest consumers of government data, often can't get their hands on much-needed information—sometimes from departments within their own jurisdiction.

Even with the best intentions, sometimes I struggle with fulfilling data requests because doing so is time consuming. One solution is for government to invest up-front to create systems that automatically publish data to the Web. For instance, as chief technical officer of the District of Columbia, Kundra implemented a system that allows everyone to subscribe to data feeds from D.C. City Hall. The street department's routine data-entry systems trigger a steady stream of minutia, like the repair of each pothole, to broadcast automatically to a Web site, sort of like Twitter for city operations.

Efforts to improve transparency in Illinois, such as by reforming the Freedom of Information Act, focus on information requests by citizens. But these efforts could have far more impact by

Keywords Showing Increases

Corruption
Bribery

(Chart: x-axis years 1986–2008; y-axis 0 to 3000)
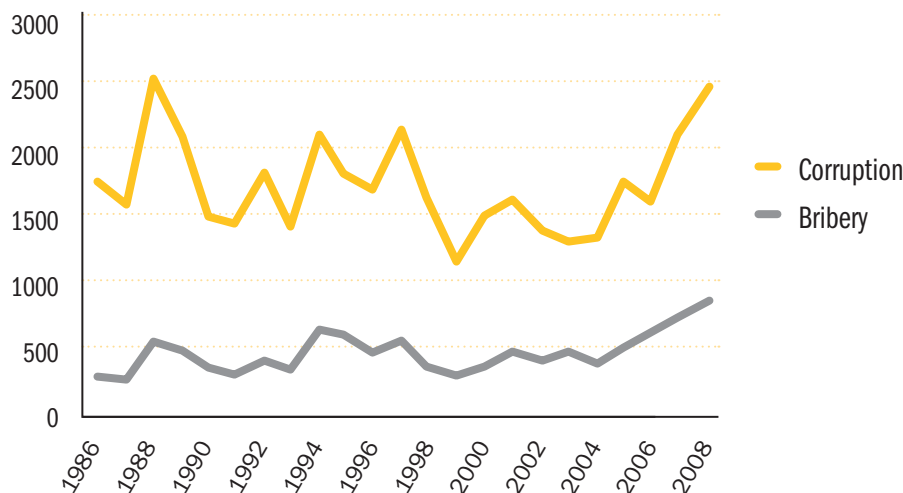
These reflected a similar trend as seen in the following chart (note the public housing line and high school graduation rates lines closely overlap).

While the measure itself was rough, the similar pattern across many different key-word searches appears to indicate that these topics have received generally less coverage as the years have gone by. It seems clear that there is less local news in our two leading newspapers today than there was 20 years ago.

Keyword Searches in Article Leads

High school graduation rates
Public housing
School reform

(Chart: x-axis years 1986–2008; y-axis 0 to 500)
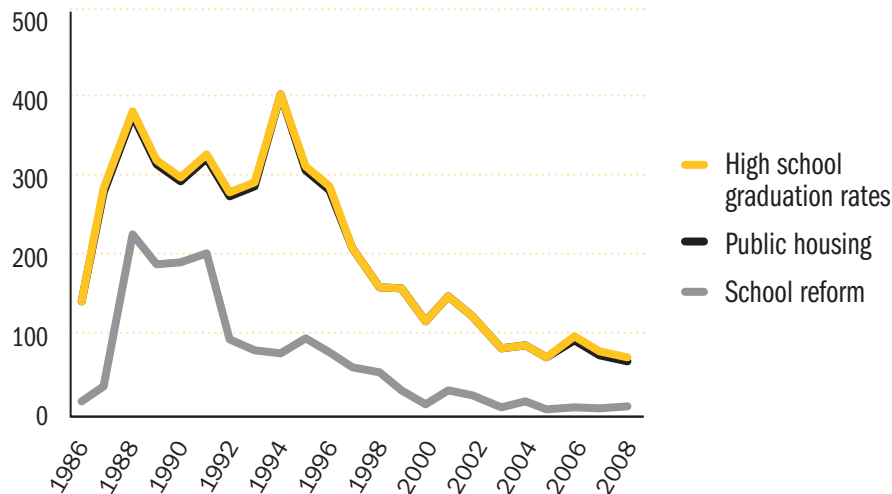
Economic and audience trends

The Internet had been threatening the news business for years before the recent spate of economic challenges. As Ken Davis noted at the Chicago Journalism Town Hall meeting on February 22, news has joined other industries transformed by the Internet:

One by one, online has been either annihilating or completely rewriting the script for just about every kind of entity, organization, company that there is. And for the longest time the same thing was about to happen to the collection writing editing and dissemination of news. How we get it, how we distribute it to the public is changing almost by the hour.[4]

improving information systems. Sure, it would be great if citizens had an easier time filing out FOIA requests for specific documents, but much better if they could access those documents over the Web without filing a request. That's transparency.

A digital-age FOIA would help, as would new transparency conditions on all recipients of federal funding. A requirement that the government post and index all public information online within a reasonable time period (with exemptions for privacy, confidentiality and public safety) would be radical and costly at first, but extremely beneficial.

How would reporters respond to true government transparency? In one sense, today's news media thrive on the status quo because they are a primary conduit for information that's otherwise difficult to acquire. Sifting through 5,700 zoning variances provides a public service, but if the public could download that data from the Web into a spreadsheet, with hyperlinks to scanned images of the original documents, would they still read the newspapers?

Thus, the boundary between what the press provides and what citizens seek out for themselves would shift but not disappear in a truly transparent environment. Investigative work and the shoe-leather coverage of everyday government operations will always fall outside the bounds of what citizens undertake for themselves.

Yes, this raises questions about who will pay for these services, and how much. But keeping our eyes on the bigger picture of the public good, removing the press from flows of information that are easily produced by government and easily consumed by citizens is a no-brainer. It's the low-hanging fruit of meaningful government reform.

As Information Architect for the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, Greg Sanders serves as coordinator for the Chicago Area Housing Web site, the Illinois Data Exchange Affiliates and the Full Circle community mapping and planning project. Greg was previously IT Director for the Cleveland Housing Network and Senior Programmer-Analyst for Penske Logistics. He has managed Technology Opportunities Program (TOP) grants in both Cleveland and Chicago. Greg holds a BA in political science from Oberlin College and a Masters degree in mass communications from Kent State.

As Davis pointed out, the changes have sped up in the past 12 months, exemplified most dramatically by layoffs of some 100 journalists at the *Tribune* alone, and many more at other news outlets. The economic crisis is exacerbating what many say are larger problems in the news business.

Revenues down

Those changes include sharp declines in advertising revenue and paid circulation. Advertising revenue is in freefall, according to the Newspaper Association of America:

- In 2008, for the first time since the association began tracking advertising in 1950, print ad revenue declined for an unprecedented third consecutive year. The 17.7 percent 2007-to-2008 decline was the steepest ever recorded.[5]

- Online advertising revenue, which had been growing by double digits in the years since the Association began to measure it, slipped 1.8 percent in 2008 to $3.109 billion.[6]

- Newspaper ad sales declined at an accelerating pace in each quarter of 2008, tumbling nearly 20 percent in the last three months of the worst year in the history of the industry.[7]

Paid circulation is also down. The Audit Bureau of Circulation reported recently that average daily circulation at 395 U.S. newspapers fell 7.09 percent in the first quarter of 2009, with daily average circulation in the three months ending on March 31, 2009, declining to 34.4 million from 37.1 million a year earlier.[8]

Audience up

At the same time, audiences for news online are growing. The Newspaper Association reported recent numbers that show visits to online newspaper sites have never been higher—a 10.5 percent increase at the end of the first quarter of 2009 over the same period the previous year.[9] There is some debate, however, as to the significance of increased traffic at newspaper Web sites. Newspaper boosters contend it shows more engaged audiences for traditional news, while others suggest the numbers fail to compensate for a historic lack of engagement between readers and reporters and editors. It may be too soon to tell.

> Visitors to newspaper Web sites use those sites less frequently, and for much less time, than readers of print editions—or visitors to online community sites.

Geoff Dougherty, Chi-Town Daily News; Ken Davis, Future of Journalism Town Hall Meeting Coordinator; Barbara Iverson, Columbia College Chicago new media maven, on WNUA "City Voices" show moderated by Thom Clark.

Podcast at communitymediaworkshop.org/podcast/?p=33

Certainly, print journalists are learning fast how to engage audiences online but it's equally clear that they have a long way to go. In the *Digital Media Cookbook*, Rich Gordon of Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University succinctly frames the problem online poses to traditional news:

Visitors to newspaper Web sites use those sites less frequently, and for much less time, than readers of print editions—or visitors to online community sites. While newspapers have gradually managed to increase the time spent with their sites, nothing they have done has produced results nearly as compelling as the astonishing growth of MySpace and Facebook in the past couple of years.[10]

Gordon's report offers insight into the problems newspapers face and suggests that they are working hard to solve them.

Chicago's new online news

There's no reason to assume that online news publications will do a better job of local news coverage than their counterparts in print and broadcast. An example involving international news helps illustrate this. The head of Public Radio International delivered a speech in 2008 about the lack of good international news, in which she noted that while local television news programs provided relatively little such news, online news did not perform better:

Last year, Pew and the Colombia J-School analyzed the 14,000 stories that appeared on Google News' front page. And they, in fact, covered the same 24 news events. Similarly, a study in e-content showed that much of global news from U.S. news creators is recycled stories from the AP wire services and Reuters, and don't put things into a context that people can understand their connection to it.

In fact, by many measures traditional newspaper sites appear to be outperforming online news publications, according to the 2009 annual *The State of The News Media* by the Pew Project

Sally Puleo, Fight Crime: Invest in Kids Illinois and Bernie Ryan, Harborquest (right)

for Excellence in Journalism.[11] One component of the study contrasts "legacy media," i.e. newspapers, with online news publications such as blogs and "citizen media" sites. Some examples:

- Legacy sites (from traditional newspapers) offered almost double the percent of news (89 percent) in comparison with citizen news sites (56 percent) and three times that of blogs (27 percent).[12]

- Citizen sites used legacy sites as news sources, with citizen sites linking to legacy news sites twice as often as legacy sites linked to citizen sites.[13]

- The topic coverage on blogs and citizen news sites is generally narrow and the sourcing is light.[14]

As the survey also notes, online news publications not produced by traditional newspapers are an emerging phenomenon. They may be rare, but rapid growth of existing online news publications and expanding numbers of such publications is another key trend. Much has been and continues to be written on this topic. We found a useful source for monitoring the development of such sites and for how-to and related information to be the Knight Citizen News Network,

a portal that guides both ordinary citizens and traditional journalists in launching and responsibly operating community news and information sites, which also assembles news innovations and research on citizen media projects.[15] The site is maintained by J-Lab, a news innovation hub.

Finally, it's notable that in reporting about of these new online news publications, Chicago is routinely cited as a national leader. One of Chicago's leading online news publications, Chi-Town Daily News, was featured in the *Washington Post* on April 1, 2009; the article focused on how the site is filling gaps in local news coverage, quoting ChiTown's Geoff Dougherty: "When you look at a situation where a number of metro papers are going out of business, the thing that really gets shut down is local coverage. We can fill the gap."[16] A couple of weeks later, *The New York Times* cited online news publication EveryBlock.com, and quoted Adrian Holovaty: "We have a very liberal definition of what is news. We think it's something that happens in your neighborhood."[17] The same day as the Times story, the *Sun-Times* reported that "the reinvention of the news gathering industry is being engineered—at least in part—in Chicago."[18]

There's no reason to assume that online news publications will do a better job of local news coverage than their counterparts in print and broadcast.

1 Ibarguen, Alberto, "The future of getting news to Americans," Holland (MI) Sentinel, May 24, 2009

2 The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, "Many Would Shrug if Their Local Newspaper Closed," *News Interest Index*, March 12, 2009, people-press.org/report/497/many-would-shrug-if-local-newspaper-closed, Accessed May 25, 2009

3 Ludtke, Melissa, ed., "Is Local News the Answer," *Nieman Reports*, Winter 2007, www.nieman.harvard.edu/reportsitem.aspx?id=100107, accessed May 26, 2009

4 See chijournalismtownhall.com/ and full audio at www.chicagopublicradio.org/Content.aspx?audioID=32307

5 "Advertising Expenditures-Annual" Newspaper Association of America Web site, www.naa.org/TrendsandNumbers/Advertising-Expenditures.aspx, accessed May 24, 2009

6 Ibid.

7 "Advertising Expenditures-Quarterly," Newspaper Association of America Web site, www.naa.org/TrendsandNumbers/Advertising-Expenditures.aspx#spotlight-Quarterly accessed May 24, 2009

8 "Average daily circulation at 395 U.S. newspapers down 7.09%, audit bureau says," by Agence France Press, April 28, 2009 at www.nationalpost.com/related/links/story.html?id=1539914 accessed May 24, 2009

9 "Newspaper Web Site Audience Increases More Than Ten Percent In First Quarter To 73.3 Million Visitors," www.naa.org/PressCenter/SearchPressReleases/2009/Newspaper-Web-Site-Audience-Increases-More-Than-Ten-Percent.aspx , accessed May 24, 2009

10 Gordon, Rich *The Online Community Cookbook: Recipes for building audience interaction at newspaper Web sites*, Newspaper Association of America, 2008 www.naa.org/docs/Digital-Media/Cookbook/Cookbook08final.pdf accessed May 24, 2009

11 Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism, *The State of the News Media: An Annual Report On American Journalism*, spring 2009, www.stateofthemedia.org/2009/index.htm, accessed May 24, 2009

12 ibid., "Special Reports: Citizen Based Media," www.stateofthemedia.org/2009/narrative_special_citizen-basedmedia.php?cat=0&media=12, accessed May

24, 2009. The special report derived from a two-year survey by researchers at three universities, "Tracking and Analyzing Community News Models," funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts and the Knight Foundation. The first phase, conducted in late 2007, was released in the 2008 State of the Media report.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 www.kcnn.org. Accessed May 24, 2009

16 Kurtz, Howard, "Chicago's Frisky Web Sites Gain Ground On the Bankrupt Newspapers," *The Washington Post* (Washington Post-Los Angeles Times News Service), April 1, 2009
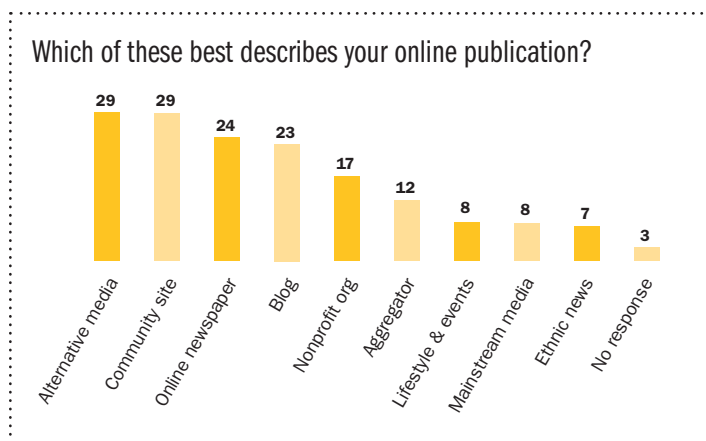
17 Miller, Claire Cain and Brad Stone, "News Without Newspapers," *The New York Times*, April 13, 2009, p. B1, Late Edition-Final

18 Spirrison, Brad "Future of news being delivered in Chicago ——EveryBlock, Printed Blog, Newser leading charge to reinvent industry," *The Chicago Sun-Times*, April 13, 2009, Final, p. 35

Who's doing what online?

Please tell us a little bit about how you are organized.

Bar chart values: Just me 22; Publication is our main mission 21; Publication is one of many missions 21; Folks doing stuff together 11; No response 8; Part of a larger online news org 10

We found that change was the only constant as we compiled this list of the most innovative online news publications in the Chicago region. Even as we were tallying survey responses and creating the final list, new ventures were launching. Lake Effect News, with the aim to cover communities once dominated by Lerner Newspapers, debuted in May. So did the Mindful Metropolis, which rose from the dead pages of alternative monthly Conscious Choice. Meanwhile, the *Chicago Tribune* was readying its ChicagoNow blog network for release in late May, with the aim to encompass 80 blogs by the end of the year.
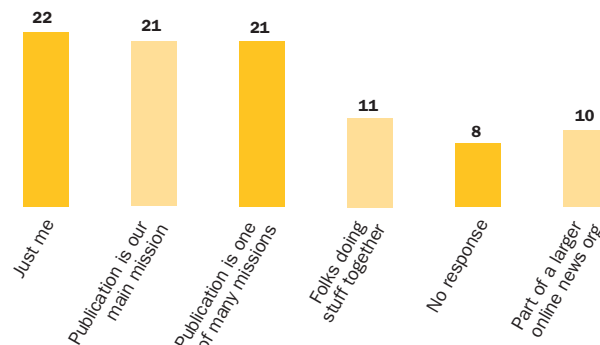
That said, what snapshot did responses to our survey portray of emerging online news in Chicago?

Which of these best describes your online publication?

Bar chart values: Alternative media 29; Community site 29; Online newspaper 24; Blog 23; Nonprofit org 17; Aggregator 12; Lifestyle & events 8; Mainstream media 8; Ethnic news 7; No response 3

Highly ranking sites

The survey turned up key surprises, such as the blend of old and new voices even among Web sites that led our rankings. With histories from a decade to a century long behind their brands, the Chicago Defender, WBEZ Chicago Public Radio, Windy City Media Group and Newcity lined up in our top 20 slots alongside upstarts like the Beachwood Reporter, Gapers Block, Chi-Town Daily News and Chicagoist. One-person blogs such as the CTA Tattler, Chicago Carless and The Urbanophile ranked highly. With the tagline, "Your Blagojevich scandals headquarters," Marathon Pundit perhaps best ap-

proached the popular image of an individual blogger hammering out political opinions at the keyboard.

Internet publications from nonprofit groups ranked among the 20 dominating sites, too, such as Progress Illinois from the Service Employees International Union. Also represented were The Chicago Reporter and Catalyst Chicago's District 299 schools blog. Other high-ranking sites came from niche newspapers with a longtime presence on city street corners, including the Chicago Journal, Chicago Parent and, again, the Chicago Defender. Thrown into the mix was Midwest Business with a dose of tech news, and Literago with a following of local bookworms.

Most of the online publications aren't backed by an established organization, and function as a side project of an individual or group rather than a core mission.

Where are they?

The majority of survey takers described their target geographic coverage area as "General City-wide" or "Metropolitan Area." Twenty-six people said they touched on broader national news and 20 said they covered goings-on in the Midwest. Some respondents opted to identify their turf among nearly 100 urban and suburban regions we described, but most declined to share such specifics.

We created a custom Google Map (See **"Chicago's new news," bit.ly/newnewsmap**) to pinpoint the locations of many top-ranking news sites. From this, Rogers Park and Hyde Park each appear to attract more than their fair share of bloggers who focus on block-club concerns such as crime reports and neighborhood meetings.

Niche topics

A number of publications touch on local real estate and development—such as YoChicago's real estate news and Edward Lifson's Hello Beautiful! blog.

Hyperlocal Web sites appear to be a natural means for people to share tips about "greening" their lifestyles. High in our rankings were emerging Chicago Web sites that focus

Although most survey takers said they served a "General Audience" or "All Adults," some identified specific ethnic, age, gender, and other groups as a target audience.

on sustainability in transportation, food, and other aspects of urban living include Chicago Carless, Green Parent, and Mindful Metropolis, as well as the ModeShift blog from the bicycle advocates of the Active Transportation Alliance. Chicago Parent and Green Parent Chicago, packed with listings of family-friendly events, reported that readers spend an unusually high number of minutes per visit there: 5 to 10 minutes against the more typical 2 minutes or less.

Some sites fill or complement the events-and-entertainment gap provided traditionally by alternative weeklies. The popular Chicagoist and Gapers Block blogs embrace area events and entertainment alongside community news. Other Web sites largely serve communities of Chicago artists and art lovers, such as Art Letter.
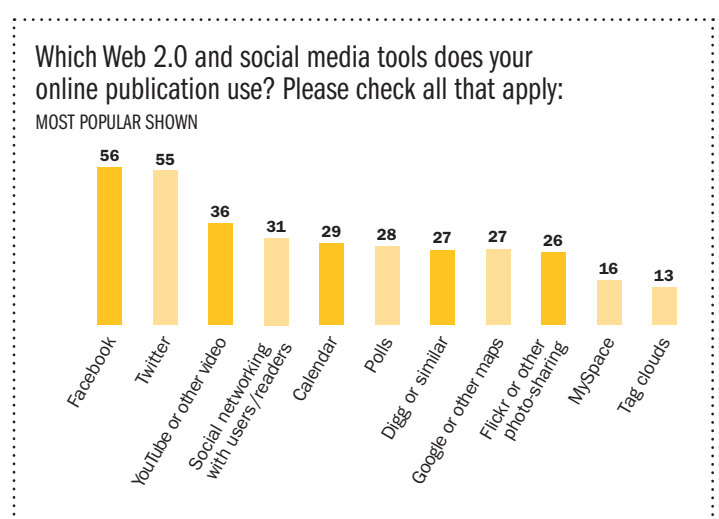
Web sites emphasizing community planning and development include Broad Shoulders Update and blogs from the Local Initiatives Support Corporation, such as Community Beat.
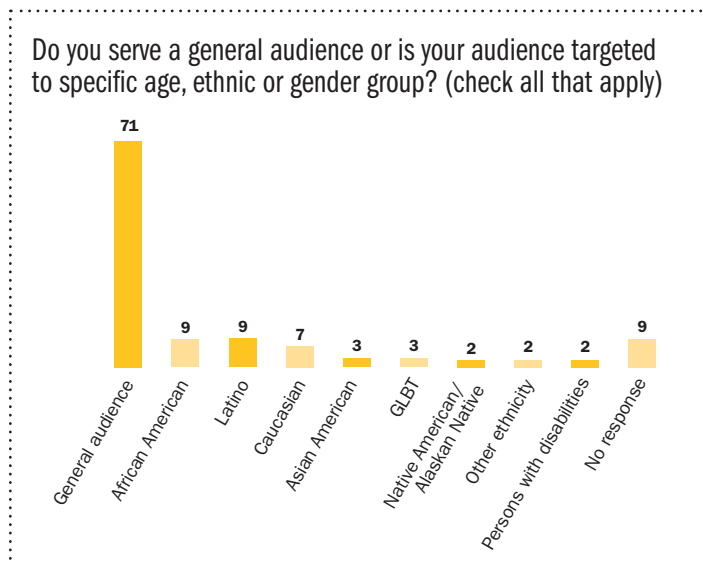
Aggregators and social media

The majority of the Web sites we tracked offer some original reporting or writing. However, those whose sole or dominant function is to aggregate news from external sources also climbed the rankings and demonstrate innovative uses of Web 2.0 tools. EveryBlock, for one, grew out of ChicagoCrime maps, lauded in social media circles for early innovation with Google Maps. Chicago is among the 35,312 communities with a presence on the Outside.In network of local sites. The Windy Citizen aggregates content by getting users to vote stories up or down the page, but it also offers original blogs. ChicagoTalks, out of Columbia College Chicago, takes a similar "crowdsourcing" approach, inviting users to submit stories. Most Web sites, however, limit their aggregation to a "linkroll," a column for related Web sites of interest. And none of the sites surveyed come close to the breadth of information offered by newspapers.

Do you serve a general audience or is your audience targeted to specific age, ethnic or gender group? (check all that apply)

General audience	African American	Latino	Caucasian	Asian American	GLBT	Native American/Alaskan Native	Other ethnicity	Persons with disabilities	No response
71	9	9	7	3	3	2	2	2	9

Which Web 2.0 and social media tools does your online publication use? Please check all that apply:
MOST POPULAR SHOWN

Facebook	Twitter	YouTube or other video	Social networking with users/readers	Calendar	Polls	Digg or similar	Google or other maps	Flickr or other photo-sharing	MySpace	Tag clouds
56	55	36	31	29	28	27	27	26	16	13

Although most survey takers said they served a "General Audience" or "All Adults," some identified specific ethnic, age, gender, and other groups as a target audience. Among those for African-Americans were the Chicago Defender, Chicago Reporter, and Bronzecomm. Publications with a Latino interest include 600 Words by Esther J. Cepeda, Contratiempo, and two blogs from Gregory Tejeda: Chicago Argus and the South Chicagoan.
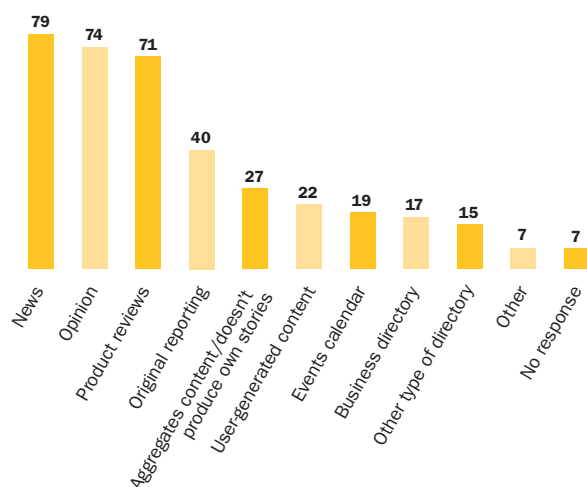
Social media tools appear to be popular among Chicago online journalists and writers. More than half of people surveyed said they use Facebook or the Twitter micro-blogging service.

However, some online news sources weren't exactly on the leading edge of Web 2.0 trends, which rely more on Web-based communication than the "old standby" e-mail. Take, for instance, the Bronzecomm e-mail list and the *Chicago Tribune*'s Daywatch e-mail briefing, which counts a whopping 60,000 subscribers.

Well-ranking sites that offer something to listen to include Chicago Public Radio online, Vocalo, and Outside the Loop Radio. The Chicagoist podcast complements its entertainment-focused blog namesake. Thirty-three survey respondents reported having a podcast or radio show.

What kind of content is available at your online publication? Please check all that apply.

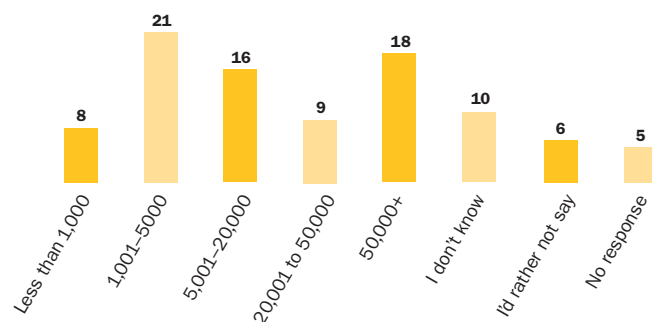| Category	Value
News	79
Opinion	74
Product reviews	71
Original reporting	40
Aggregates content/doesn't produce own stories	27
User-generated content	22
Events calendar	19
Business directory	17
Other type of directory	15
Other	7
No response	7

Audience engagement

Unlike letters to the editor, online news offers the potential for virtually any reader to chime in with a public comment on a story. While this interactivity may empower readers, it's a mixed blessing for writers and editors who find their content a 24-hour target of praise or criticism on the Internet. When asked how many comments their stories had received in March, 44 respondents reported receiving 50 or fewer comments in March, and 20 said they received 50 or more comments. A significant number of survey respondents—16—said they offered no feedback mechanism for readers, raising questions in our minds about the transparency and vetting of what can pass as news online.

The Internet is arguably the cheapest, most democratic publishing medium in history. Its freedom of expression also means that diverse voices will express themselves in ways that might draw scorn from professional journalists. Any blogger, for instance, can reserve the right to express themselves without engaging visitors by turning off reader comments. We found more than a handful of bloggers hiding behind a pen name, such as the Woodlawn Wonder of I Hate My Developer blog. Anonymity can be an effective means of broadcasting a controversial message without attracting personal trouble.

More disturbing, perhaps, were more than a handful of

blogs that failed to offer any way for readers to consider or contact the source—one of the most frustrating research challenges of this project. Some online writers with pen names provide a role long held by pamphleteers; they get a message out, but readers who want to consider the source may not be able to find it. By cloaking their identities, such writers use the Internet's cheap mass distribution yet shun its interactivity. By contrast, the news Web sites of nonprofit organizations or publicly held corporations generally offer, at the least, online forms to which a reader can vent a frustration or hurtle a question.

About how many visitors did you have to your site in March 2009?

Category	Value
Less than 1,000	8
1,001–5000	21
5,001–20,000	16
20,001 to 50,000	9
50,000+	18
I don't know	10
I'd rather not say	6
No response	5

Size of the sites

Efforts to understand the size of each Web site's readership proved difficult. In online publishing, the closest equivalent to the circulation count of a print newspaper is the measurement of unique, individual visitors. We asked people to describe their number of unique visitors for the month of March. Among the 65 respondents who shared such self-reported figures, 20 described a modest readership of less than 5,000. Sites with a modest audience by and large fit

How many writers or editors are paid?

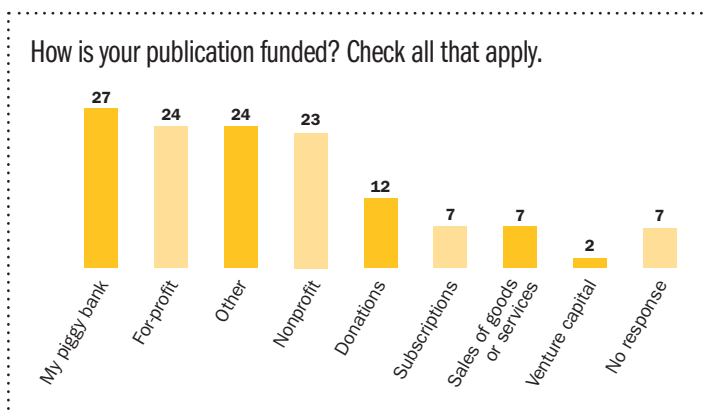| Category	Value
None	37
1	10
2-3	12
4-6	9
7–10	5
10+	6
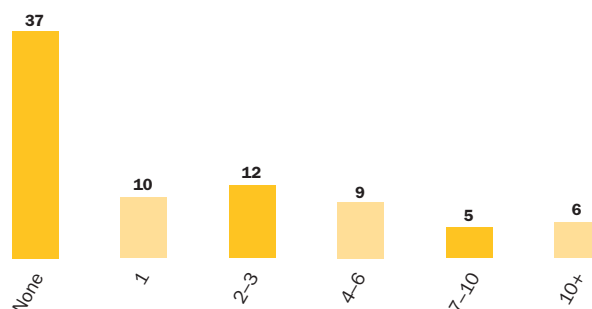
the profile of one-person, niche interest blogs. Others were so hyperlocal that their readership was naturally small, like the population of the neighborhoods they covered. Therefore, a headcount of readers shouldn't be the best or only means for measuring the potential community relevance and influence of such grassroots Web sites.

Even more respondents reported substantial readership; 26 counted 5,000 to 20,000 monthly visitors. Another 17 polled said that an impressive 50,000 or more people stopped at their site in March, 2009. Unfortunately, 23 respondents either didn't know or declined to give a concrete answer, an option we allowed.

Among 80 respondents who answered our question about copyrights, nearly 60 percent considered the content on their sites covered under traditional copyright laws and some 28 percent said they had no special protection or licensing. Another 11 percent said they use the open-source Creative Commons license.

How is your publication funded? Check all that apply.

Category	Count
My piggy bank	27
For-profit	24
Other	24
Nonprofit	23
Donations	12
Subscriptions	7
Sales of goods or services	7
Venture capital	2
No response	7

In business

The majority of the Web sites in our list appear not to sustain significant profits or any at all. When asked about their publication's funding, 29 people polled chose our "piggy bank" option. Nearly equal were the number of people considering their operations nonprofit (22) and for-profit (23). A tiny minority of two respondents described receiving venture capital, the traditional seed funding for would-be professional online ventures, at least in Silicon Valley.

Innovation and aggregation:
Why news needs a bigger— and more beneficial—'tapeworm'
BY JUSTIN MASSA

While the lines continue to blur among the quality and types of content produced by traditional media and their Web-based counterparts—including amateurs, hobbyists and start-ups— the battle over distribution is just heating up.

Wall Street Journal editor Robert Thomson recently wrote of Web sites, like Google, that aggregate content without paying fees to the content creators, "There is no doubt that certain Web sites are best described as parasites or tech tapeworms in the intestines of the Internet."[1]

This criticism of aggregation without payment has merit but misses the broader point. Once traditional media operations opened themselves up to search engines and began sharing their stories in RSS feeds, the cat was out of the bag. Disconnecting their online presence from the rest of the Internet simply isn't an option, and nearly all experiments with Internet-only subscription fees have been unsustainable.

Figuring out the model of distribution, aggregation and syndication will define the next decade of journalism, presenting at the same time incredible opportunity and enormous challenge. To use Thomson's term, the future of media lies in building a better tapeworm.

It's hard to talk about the future of journalism without bringing up ChicagoCrime.org and EveryBlock.com, which exemplify early innovation in aggregation and provide us with insight as to what may come next. Adrian Holovaty's ChicagoCrime was the progenitor "mashup," aggregating two previously uncombined elements into something amazing. By simply layering city crime reports over interactive Google Maps and sorting them by time and type, the site enabled anyone to view and analyze crime in their community.

The next generation of mashups took this concept to a new level. By aggregating everything from street closures to home sales to restaurant reviews around a specific location and presenting it beautifully, EveryBlock became the gold standard for presenting hyperlocal news. Similar sites now exist for a variety of other audiences; Trulia.com aggregates data, maps, and home listings for homebuyers, and Hulu.com aggregates dozens of television networks for TV watchers. These Web sites are popular and useful because they are comprehensive, constantly innovating and expanding, and thoughtful about how they present and organize data.

This model of the distributed Web was born 10 years ago when in 1999 Netscape pioneered the use of RSS. Through the My Netscape portal, using the "Rich Site Summary" standard, users could create a custom homepage that aggregated information from any Web site that shared their content. The project was abandoned when AOL purchased Netscape in 2001, but a group of open source developers picked up the project and re-dubbed it "Really Simple Syndication."

By 2005, Microsoft's Outlook e-mail software and Internet Explorer as well as Web browsers Opera and Firefox had all adopted the standard. RSS became mainstream; the *Chicago Tribune* shared its first RSS feed in early 2005.

At first, publishers of all types of content embraced syndication. Instead of having to rely on visitors to remember to return

Chicago's NEW news

Asoutlined on page 23, composite ratings were compiled from 6 criteria—3 self-reported, 2 from third-party sites, and 1 qualitative assessment by Community Media Workshop.

⭐ **OVERALL RANKING**

1. Chi-Town Daily News

★★★★¹

www.chitowndailynews.org

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: Neighborhood and public affairs journalism for Chicago

STARTED: 12/1/05

CONTACT: Geoff Dougherty, Editor
geoff@chitowndailynews.org

800 W. Huron St., Suite 3E
Chicago, IL 60642

2. Windy City Media Group

★★★★¹

www.windycitymediagroup.com

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: News and entertainment for the LGBT communities

STARTED: Mid 1990s as a complement to the print edition

CONTACT: Tracy Baim, Publisher
editor@windycitymediagroup.com

Windy City Media Group
1900 S. Prairie Ave.
Chicago, IL 60616

AUDIO: www.windycityqueercast.com

VIDEO: www.QueerTVNetwork.com
(under the VIDEO button)

TWITTER: windycitytimes1

3. Gapers Block

★★★★¹

www.gapersblock.com

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: Chicago news, events and other things of note

STARTED: 4/1/03

CONTACT: Andrew Huff, Editor & Publisher
ah@gapersblock.com

P.O. Box 13524
Chicago, IL 60613

PHOTOS: www.flickr.com/groups/gapers_block

TWITTER: gapersblock

4. Progress Illinois

★★★★¹

www.progressillinois.com

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: Progressive news and commentary on metro and state politics in Illinois

STARTED: 3/1/08

CONTACT: Josh Kalven, Editor
jkalven@gmail.com

222 W. Ontario St. #310
Chicago, IL 60654

VIDEO: www.youtube.com/ProgressIllinois

TWITTER: progressil

5. Windy Citizen

★★★★¹

www.windycitizen.com

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: A social media service like Twitter, where participants share links and comment on their favorite Chicago news of the day

STARTED: 5/1/08

CONTACT: Brad Flora, CEO
editor@windycitizen.com

TWITTER: windycitizen

6. WBEZ Chicago Public Radio

★★★★¹

www.chicagopublicradio.org

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: Timely and in-depth coverage of Chicago-area news, arts and culture

STARTED: 2/1/06

CONTACT: Justin Kaufmann:
jkaufmann@chicagopublicradio.org;
Andrew Gill: agill@chicagopublicradio.org;
Carrie Shepherd: cshepherd@chicagopublicradio.org;
Andrew Gill: agill@chicagopublicradio.org

848 E. Grand Ave. (Navy Pier)
Chicago, IL 60611

MULTIPLE PODCASTS: www.wbez.org/Tools.aspx

MULTIMEDIA BLOG: apps.wbez.org/blog

CHICAGO MATTERS: www.chicagopublicradio.org/ChicagoMatters.aspx Multimedia Reporting Projects (50/50): www.chicagopublicradio.org/5050.aspx

MULTIMEDIA REPORTING PROJECTS (HARD WORKING): www.chicagopublicradio.org/Cityroom_Series.aspx?seriesID=131 www.chicagopublicradio.org/5050

VIDEO: www.youtube.com/wbez

PHOTOS: www.flickr.com/groups/chicagopublicradio

7. Chicago Parent

★★★★

www.chicagoparent.com

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: Parenting

STARTED: No answer

CONTACT: Graham Johnston,
Manager of Internet and Technology
gjohnston@wjinc.com

141 S. Oak Park Ave.
Oak Park, IL 60302

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to their site day after day, they could push content to the programs or custom homepages. By sharing content in a standard format, publishers empowered developers to figure out ways to sort and remix their content in millions of different ways.

But RSS proved only to be the beginning. Additional standards began to emerge with an alphabet soup of names— such as JSON, XML, GeoRSS, and KML— that focused on sharing all sorts of content beyond text. Web sites began to syndicate data sets, maps, calendars, video, audio, and images.

The trend towards a distributed Web becomes accelerated with the explosion of the application programming interface, or API, which enables Web sites to exchange nearly any type of information automatically. And the practice of "screen scraping" enables data on a Web site to be syndicated even without the publisher adopting a shared standard. Nearly every type of content has been set free.

Complicating matters for those hunting for a business model in this new

> There is no doubt that certain Web sites are best described as parasites or tech tapeworms in the intestines of the Internet.
>
> ROBERT THOMSON, *WALL STREET JOURNAL*

environment, the tools to aggregate content in incredibly rich and complex ways are free. Open source content management systems are growing more powerful. This is a scary climate for many journalists. When the public can read your stories, view your pictures, and interact with your source data without ever visiting your Web site or viewing your ads, how are you supposed to pay the bills?

More than any other outlet, the New York Times has embraced this new landscape and is trailblazing a path for other publishers. Through their APIs for articles, books, movie reviews, comments, real estate, campaign contributions, and legislative records they are

sharing nearly their entire archive with the Web for free—with a few important caveats. Web sites using the API must be non-commercial (although a paid version is available for for-profit sites). In addition, the content pulled through the API can't be archived but must be requested anew for each user, and all content must clearly link back to and be attributed to the *Times*. (developer.nytimes.com/attribution)

"One thing that big media still does

> People didn't buy newspapers because they liked specific formulas of paper and ink but because of the words and images they delivered.

have a particularly good share of….is information processing resources and archival content," said Marshall Kirkpatrick on the ReadWriteWeb blog, explaining the power of APIs. "The newspaper is far better prepared to organize that raw information, and perhaps offer complimentary content, than any individual blogger or small news publisher." (www.ReadWriteWeb.com/archives/the_first_new_york_times_api_i.php)

It's unfortunate that multiple newspapers are planning to create new devices, such as electronic paper, to deliver the news. People didn't buy newspapers because they liked specific formulas of paper and ink but because of the words and images they delivered. TV stations don't make televisions and radio stations don't make radios for good reason; their strengths lie in creating content rather than building devices.

Journalists should return to their roots, focusing on how they create and contextualize content through some innovative online aggregation of their own rather than building a new device or closing themselves off from the rest of the Web.

Justin Massa is the executive director/co-founder of MoveSmart.org and the Program and Technical Coordinator for NetSquared, an initiative of TechSoup Global.

1 www.theaustralian.news.com.au/business/story/0,28124,25293711-7582,00.html

8. Catalyst Chicago
★★★☆

www.catalyst-chicago.org/notebook

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: Public education policy & school reform

STARTED: 2/1/90

CONTACT: Veronica Anderson, Editor-in-Chief
anderson@catalyst-chicago.org

332 S. Michigan Ave., Suite 500
Chicago, Illinois 60604

TWITTER: CatalystChicago

9. Chicagoist
★★★☆

www.chicagoist.com

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: Chicago! News, events, food, etc.

STARTED: 2004

CONTACT: Marcus Gilmer

AUDIO: chicagoist.com/tags/podcast

TWITTER: Chicagoist

10. Midwest Business
★★★☆

www.midwestbusiness.com

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: Business technology news in Chicago and the Midwest

STARTED: 1/1/00

CONTACT: Brad Spirrison, Founder, Director
brad@chicago.com

3501 N. Southport Ave. #262
Chicago, IL 60657

AUDIO: www.archive.org/search.php?query=subject%3A%22midwestbusiness.com%22

11. CTA Tattler
★★★★

www.ctatattler.com

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: News and notes about all things regarding the CTA, including strange things seen and heard aboard trains and buses

STARTED: 6/1/04

CONTACT: Kevin O'Neil, Owner/Operator
kjoneil84@gmail.com

TWITTER: kjo84

12. The Beachwood Reporter
★★★★

www.beachwoodreporter.com

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: A Chicago-centric news and culture review that also includes award-winning investigative reporting

STARTED: 2/1/06

CONTACT: Steve Rhodes, Editor & Publisher
srhodes@beachwoodreporter.com

The Beachwood Media Company
1427 N. Wicker Park Ave.
Chicago, IL 60622

VIDEO: www.youtube.com/beachdust

PHOTOS: www.flickr.com/photos/beachwoodreporter

TWITTER: BeachwoodReport

13. Newcity
★★★★

www.newcity.com

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: Neighborhood news

STARTED: 1996

CONTACT: Brian Hieggelke, Editor/Publisher
brian@newcity.com

Newcity Communications, Inc.
770 N. Halsted St., Suite 303
Chicago, IL 60622

TWITTER: newcity

14. Chicago Defender
★★★★

www.chicagodefender.com

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: News that relates to the African-American community (music, culture, sports, political, social, legal)

STARTED: 1/31/08

CONTACT: Shamontiel L. Vaughn, Web Editor
svaughn@chicagodefender.com

200 S. Michigan Ave., 17th Floor
Chicago, IL 60604

TWITTER: chicagodefender

15. District 299
★★★☆

www.district299.com

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: Chicago schools (elementary and secondary)

STARTED: 2006

CONTACT: Alexander Russo, Creator
alexanderrusso@gmail.com

TWITTER: district299

16. The Chicago Reporter
★★★★

www.chicagoreporter.com

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: An investigative monthly that reports on race and poverty issues in Chicago metro area

STARTED: 1997

CONTACT: Alden K. Loury, Editor and Publisher
aldenl@chicagoreporter.com

332 S. Michigan Ave., Suite 500
Chicago, IL 60604

AUDIO: radio show, through Web site main page

TWITTER: ChicagoReporter

17. The Urbanophile
★★★★

www.theurbanophile.blogspot.com

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: Urban affairs and the future of the Midwest city—the intersection of policy, architecture and design, strategy, transportation, economic development, talent acquisition, arts and culture, and demographics

STARTED: 12/1/06

CONTACT: Aaron M. Renn, Owner
arenn@urbanophile.com

TWITTER: urbanophile

18. Chicago Carless
★ ★ ★ ⌐

www.chicagocarless.com

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: The Life and Times of a Former New Yorker Living in Downtown Chicago

STARTED: 6/27/05

CONTACT: Mike Doyle
mike@chicagocarless.com

VIDEO: www.youtube.com/user/chicagocarless

19. 600 Words by Esther J. Cepeda
★ ★ ★ ⌐

www.600words.com

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: Current events with a Hispanic bent

STARTED: 4/1/08

CONTACT: Esther J. Cepeda, Columnist
eejaycee@600words.com

TWITTER: ejc600words

20. Marathon Pundit
★ ★ ★ ⌐

www.marathonpundit.blogspot.com

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: Politics, local and national

STARTED: 1/1/05

CONTACT: John Ruberry, Blogger
john.ruberry@sbcglobal.net

TWITTER: marathonpundit

21. Community Media Workshop
★ ★ ★ ⌐

www.communitymediaworkshop.org

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: Neighborhood news

STARTED: Newstips.org, 1997; CommunityMediaworkshop.org, January 2008

CONTACT: Thom Clark, President
thom@newstips.org

600 S. Michigan Ave.
Chicago, IL 60605

AUDIO: communitymediaworkshop.org/podcast

VIDEO: communitymediaworkshop.org/vlog

TWITTER: npcommunicator

22. Greg Hinz blog @ chicagobusiness.com
★ ★ ★ ⌐

www.chicagobusiness.com/hinz

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: Chicago-focused politics and government

STARTED: 10/1/08

CONTACT: Greg Hinz, Columnist Blogger
ghinz@crain.com

Crain's Chicago Business
360 N. Michigan Ave.
Chicago, IL 60657

23. Southwest Observer
★ ★ ★ ⌐

www.southwestobserver.com

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: Neighborhood news

STARTED: 3/1/07

CONTACT: Michael Fielding, Editor
editor@southwestobserver.com

Southwest Observer, a branch of Romeii, LLC
P.O. Box 146
Hudson, WI 54016

VIDEO: Web site home page, under video tab, Observer: Live tab (live broadcasting), and News/Video Clips

PHOTOS: Web site home, under Community/Photos

TWITTER: swobserver

24. EveryBlock
★ ★ ★ ⌐

chicago.everyblock.com

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: Neighborhood news for Chicago and 10 other cities

STARTED: 1/1/08

CONTACT: Adrian Holovaty, Founder
adrian@everyblock.com

228 S. Wabash Ave., Suite 401
Chicago, IL 60604

TWITTER: everyblock

25. Illinois Review
★ ★ ★ ⌐

www.illinoisreview.typepad.com

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: Conservative perspective on Illinois politics

STARTED: 11/1/05

CONTACT: Fran Eaton, Editor
featon@illinoisreview.com

P.O. Box 233
Oak Forest, IL 60452

VIDEO: illinoisreview

TWITTER: IR_Editor

26. Green Parent Chicago
★ ★ ★ ⌐

www.greenparentchicago.typepad.com

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: Eco-friendly and off the mainstream news, events and activities for green living and natural family living in Chicago

STARTED: 4/1/08

CONTACT: Christine S. Escobar, Founder and Editor, Lead Writer
editors@greenparentchicago.com

TWITTER: greenparentchgo

L3Cs:
For-profit financing with a soul

BY SALLY DUROS

For nearly two decades, newspapers have faced the challenge of evolving into knowledge-based organizations capable of adapting to the innovations of the Web.

Instead of progressing, however, they've been bought and sold by media conglomerates whose mismanagement has buried papers with debt while laying off staff in record numbers. Both profits and the product—the news—have seriously degraded.

Locally-focused stories in newspapers have been shrinking, as has information geared toward the average wage earner. Readers have fled. Advertising revenue has plunged. The *Chicago Tribune* and the Chicago *Sun-Times* both have filed for bankruptcy, and it's possible that soon Chicago could be without a newspaper.

But Chicagoans are not without information. A new ecosystem of blogs and news aggregators has developed on the Web. Many of these sites—like New Communities (www.newcommunities.org), the BeachwoodReporter (www.beachwoodreporter.com) and Newstips (www.newstips.org/interior.php?section=Newstips)—are run by journalists working with passion to tell underreported stories digitally. And legacy newsrooms are creating alliances with online news sites, such as the *Chicago Tribune*'s ChicagoNow blog network set to launch in June.

Even as new newsrooms emerge and old ones die, it won't do to build anew upon old models of financing. Instead, the news sector needs a financing model that is flexible and innovative. The model of the L3C, or low-profit limited liability company, will enable agile, sustainable knowledge-based newsrooms.

The L3C merges foundation money, specifically program-related investments, with investor's cash in a mission-based business that puts purpose before profits.

Under this model, a newsroom will pay a living wage to journalists and executive leadership while earning a return for investors. Most importantly, because it is mission-based, the L3C signals a return to the historical value of newspapers: local news.

How might this develop in the Chicago area?

In May the Illinois House of Representatives unanimously passed a bill (SB 0239) creating L3Cs. Upon signing by the governor, any social entrepreneur will be able to create an L3C in the state. In allowing L3Cs, Illinois joins Vermont, Michigan, Wyoming, Utah, North Dakota, and the Crow Tribe.

But L3C newsrooms will not be a reality until passage of a federal bill, the PRI Promotion Act of 2009, which contains a provision that recognizes newspapers as charitable. It also would make the processes of creating and reporting for an L3C as automatic as those for 501(c)3 organizations. That bill has not yet been introduced in Congress.

Among those calling the bill necessary for forming a newspaper L3C is Jennifer Towery, Peoria Newspaper Guild President. She is advocating for L3C ownership of the Peoria Journal Star.

> Even as new newsrooms emerge and old ones die, it won't do to build a new upon old models of financing.

Backers of the L3C model aim to make it an instantly recognizable brand name for social enterprise, just like 501(c)3 is for nonprofits, overseen and administered by the IRS.

The buzz was all about L3Cs at the Social Enterprise Alliance in New Orleans in April, for instance, but still big questions circulated: Why use an L3C when you could do much the same activity with a regular LLC, or limited liability company?

Marcus Owens, a member in Caplin & Drysdale's Washington, D.C., law office, and former director of the Exempt Organizations Division of the Internal

27. Daywatch: Chicago Tribune
★★★

www.chicagotribune.com/daywatch

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: Daily e-mail news briefing

STARTED: 1999

CONTACT: Charlie Meyerson, Senior Producer
cmeyerson@comcast.net

435 N. Michigan Ave., TT 400
Chicago, IL 60611

TWITTER: Daywatch

28. Lynn Sweet
★★★

www.blogs.suntimes.com/sweet

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: President Obama, Michelle, Congress and Chicago interests in Washington

STARTED: 2/1/06

CONTACT: Lynn Sweet, Washington Bureau Chief
lsweet3022@aol.com

Lynn Sweet, Chicago *Sun-Times*
1206 National Press Building
Washington, DC 20045

29. McHenry County Blog
★★★★

www.mchenrycountyblog.com

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: McHenry County and Illinois news and politics

STARTED: 10/1/05

CONTACT: Cal Skinner
calskinner2@gmail.com

30. Outside.In
★★★

www.outside.in/Chicago_IL

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: Hyperlocal news aggregator

STARTED: 9/1/06

CONTACT: Chrysanthe Tenentes, Community Coordinator
chrysanthe@outside.in

20 Jay St., Suite 1019
Brooklyn, NY 11201

TWITTER: outsidein

31. Chicago Journal
★★★

www.chicagojournal.com

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: Community/neighborhood news of the South Loop, West Loop and Near West Side

CONTACT: Micah Maidenberg, Editor
mmaidenberg@chicagojournal.com

Wednesday Journal, Inc.
141 S. Oak Park Ave.
Oak Park, IL 60302

32. Chicago News Bench
★★★

www.rogersparkbench.blogspot.com

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: News, photography and conservative political commentary

STARTED: 10/1/06

CONTACT: Tom Mannis
rogersparkbench@yahoo.com

VIDEO: www.youtube.com/rogersparkbench

TWITTER: chinewsbench

33. Windy Pixel
★★★

www.thewindypixel.com

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: Unique and outstanding photographic images of the city accompanied by stories and views of what is going on in photography and Chicago

STARTED: 3/1/09

CONTACT: Justin Kern
justinwkern@gmail.com

PHOTOS: www.flickr.com/photos/24894289@N08
www.flickr.com/photos/mikeboehmer
www.flickr.com/photos/anniewisc

TWITTER: thewindypixel

34. Art Letter
★★★

www.artletter.com

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: Growing community, raising consciousness about visual art in Chicago

Started: 9/1/04

CONTACT: Paul Klein
paul@artletter.com

TWITTER: artadvocate

35. Bronzecomm
★★★

www.bronzecomm.com

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: Email service providing news, events and announcements of special interest to Chicago-area African Americans

STARTED: Fall 2002

CONTACT: Raynard Hall, Publisher
radarnard@mindspring.com

36. Chicago Reader
★★★

www.chicagoreader.com

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: News and listings

STARTED: Online 1994

CONTACT: Steve Timble, Associate Publisher
stimble@chicagoreader.com

11 E. Illinois St.
Chicago, IL 60611

37. New Communities

★★★₁

www.newcommunities.org

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: Chicago

STARTED: 2004

CONTACT: Gordon Walek, Communications Manager
gwalek@lisc.org

LISC/Chicago
1 N. LaSalle St., 12th Floor
Chicago, IL 60602

VIDEO: LISC New Communities and LISCTu

PHOTOS: www.flickr.com/lisc-chicago

38. YoChicago

★★★₁

www.yochicago.com

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: New residential construction
and real estate issues in Chicago

STARTED: 12/1/06

CONTACT: Joseph Askins, Editor
jaskins@yochicago.com

Data Based Ads Inc.
363 W. Erie St., Suite 500E
Chicago, IL 60654

VIDEO: www.youtube.com/yochicago1
www.youtube.com/newhomenotebook
www.youtube.com/therealestateexperts

PHOTOS: www.flickr.com/photos/yochicago1

TWITTER: yochicago

39. Vocalo.org

★★★

www.vocalo.org

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: A user-generated Web site
and radio station

STARTED: No answer

CONTACT: Shannon Heffernan,
Online Community Manager
info@vocalo.org

848 E. Grand Ave.
Chicago, IL 60647

AUDIO: Radio: On air at 89.5FM;
streaming at www.vocalo.org/on-air

PODCAST: feeds2.feedburner.com/vocapodcast

VIDEO: www.vocalo.org

PHOTOS: None, but we can be found on
photobucket.com

TWITTER: vocalo and/or shannon_h
(community manager)

40. ArchPundit

★★★

www.archpundit.com

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: Illinois politics

STARTED: 8/1/02

CONTACT: Larry Handlin, Publisher
archpundit@gmail.com

VIDEO: www.youtube.com/archpundit

PHOTOS: www.flickr.com/photos/archpundit

TWITTER: archpundit

41. Hello Beautiful!

★★★

www.edwardlifson.com

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: Architecture

STARTED: 2003

CONTACT: Edward Lifson
ELifson@gmail.com

42. Inside Online

★★★

www.yournews.com

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: General information, news & events

STARTED: insideronline in 1996; yournews in 2008

CONTACT: Ronald Roenigk, Publisher
inside@britsys.net

Inside Publications
6221 N. Clark St.
Chicago, IL 60660

43. The Hinsdalean

★★★

www.thehinsdalean.com

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: Community news in Hinsdale

STARTED: 9/1/06

CONTACT: Jim Slonoff, Publisher
jslonoff@thehinsdalean.com

7 W. First St.
Hinsdale, IL 60521

44. Ferdy on Films, etc.

★★★

www.ferdyonfilms.com

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: Film reviews and commentary

STARTED: 12/1/05

CONTACT: Marilyn Ferdinand
marilynferdinand@comcast.net

TWITTER: FerdyonFilms

45. Chicago Weekly

★★★

www.chicagoweekly.net

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: News, arts and culture
of the South Side, centered around the
University of Chicago

STARTED: 2007

CONTACT: Editor
cwedit@gmail.com

Newcity Communications
770 N. Halsted St., Suite 303
Chicago, IL 60642

Revenue Service, explained via e-mail:

> An enterprise formed as an L3C…
> clearly and concisely signals to
> the foundation community that the
> enterprise has an overriding socially-
> beneficial purpose, without a need
> for examining the organizing docu-
> ment (which would be the case with
> any LLC or non-profit corporation).

Why is this important?

In the 1960s, the IRS created program-
related investments as a tool to enable
foundations to invest in a for-profit
venture doing social good, now much
more common and known as a
social enterprise. Such investments
were meant to fulfill much the same
purpose as a grant, yet could possibly
yield a modest return.

However, no process of registration
was created for these program-related
investments—unlike, for instance, the
relatively simple process by which a
nonprofit organization can become a
501(c)3 with the IRS.

This murkiness caused hesitation
among foundations that were unclear
about what qualified as program-
related investments. They could ask
the IRS for a private letter ruling, which
could cost thousands to hundreds of
thousands of dollars. Therefore, only
five percent of foundations bothered to
designate program-related investments.

With creation of the L3C, foundations
have a tool that meshes with IRS rules
and smooths the way for investments
in social enterprise.

Some describe an L3C as a for-profit
with a nonprofit soul—a fitting model
for newspapers, as they are the only
business specifically recognized in the
Constitution, and the information they
provide is vital to democracy.

*Sally Duros has spent the past two
decades observing the dance between
technology and journalism. Social en-
terprise is the next big shift. Duros has
revived the Real Estate section for the
Chicago Sun-Times, facilitated cross-
sector partnerships for Chicago Mayor
Richard M. Daley and celebrated the
chaos of being an independent journal-
ist and communications consultant.
She blogs at SallyDuros.com (www.
sallyduros.com) and uses Twitter at the
name saduros (twitter.com/saduros).*

46. Business POV
★★✦

www.businessPOV.com

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: Business, economic activity, innovation, entrepreneurship

STARTED: September 2006

CONTACT: Mark Scheffler, Founder/Executive Producer mscheffler@businessPOV.com

AUDIO: www.businessPOV.com

47. Chicago Magazine online
★★✦

www.chicagomag.com

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: General interest Chicago

STARTED: 1998

CONTACT: Bill Oakes, Web Manager boakes@chicagomag.com

435 N. Michigan Ave., Suite 1100 Chicago, IL 60611

VIDEO: www.youtube.com/chicagomag

48. Hyde Park Progress
★★✦

www.hydeparkprogress.blogspot.com

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: Local politics and culture

STARTED: 7/25/07

CONTACT: David Hoyt, Blog Administrator chicago.pop@gmail.com

49. Literago
★★✦

www.literago.org

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: Literary events & news in Chicago

STARTED: 5/1/06

CONTACT: Gretchen Kalwinski, Managing Editor gretchen.kalwinski@gmail.com

3025 W. Logan Blvd., #1 Chicago, IL 60647

50. Outside the Loop RADIO
★★✦

www.outsidethelooopradio.com

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: Local stories, local interviews, topics that don't always get local mainstream coverage

STARTED: 9/1/06

CONTACT: Mike Stephen, Host/Executive Producer mike@outsidethelooopradio.com

AUDIO: www.outsidethelooopradio.com

TWITTER: outsidetheloop

51. The Sixth Ward
★★✦

www.thesixthward.blogspot.com

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: A blog on ward issues and state & local politics

STARTED: 11/1/07

CONTACT: Levois, Student itsmymind@gmail.com

TWITTER: thesixthward

52. Near West Side Community Development Corporation
★★✦

www.nearwestsidecdc.org/home.aspx

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: community news

STARTED: 2006

CONTACT: 216 S. Hoyne Ave. Chicago, IL 60612

VIDEO: Yes

PHOTOS: Yes

53. The Ride
★★✦

www.blogs.suntimes.com/transportation

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: Transportation issues

STARTED: 2/1/08

CONTACT: Mary Wisniewski, Transportation Reporter mwisniewski@suntimes.com

Chicago Sun-Times 350 N. Orleans St., Floor 9 Chicago, IL 60654

54. 24/7 North of Howard Watchers
★★✦

www.howardwatchers.blogspot.com

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: A chronological history of the North of Howard area—the decline of a neighborhood into a pocket of poverty and its struggles, challenges and transitions

STARTED: 1/1/05

CONTACT: Toni Duncan howardwatchers@aol.com

PHOTOS: www.flickr.com/photos/79822180@N00

55. Chicago Argus
★★✦

www.chicagoargus.blogspot.com

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: Chicago, along with the issues of the world as perceived from Chicago

STARTED: 12/1/07

CONTACT: Gregory Tejeda, Publisher, Editor gregoryt1965@gmail.com

56. Hyde Park Herald & Lakefront Outlook
★★✦

www.hpherald.com

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: News in the neighborhoods of Hyde Park and Bronzeville

STARTED: Herald in the '90s; Outlook in 2009

CONTACT: Gabriel Piemonte, Editor g.piemo@hpherald.com

Herald Newspapers, Inc. 1435 E. Hyde Park Blvd. Chicago, IL 60615

57. Claretian Associates
★★✦

www.claretianassociates.org

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: Nonprofit community development corporation in South Chicago

STARTED: 2003

58. Logan Square Neighborhood Association
★★✦

www.lsna.net

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: The work of the Logan Square Neighborhood Association

STARTED: 2005

CONTACT: Monica G. Chavez, Technology and Communications Coordinator mgarreton@lsna.net

2840 N. Milwaukee Ave. Chicago, IL 60618

VIDEO: www.youtube.com/user/lsnanet

59. Contratiempo
★★✦

www.revistacontratiempo.com

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: Latino social issues, arts and literature

STARTED: 2005

CONTACT: Moira Pujols, Executive Director moirapujols@aol.com

1702 South Halsted St. Chicago, IL 60608

AUDIO: Chicago Public Radio Chicago Amplified

60. I Hate My Developer
★★✦

www.ihatemydeveloper.blogspot.com

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: Developer/condo-related issues, urban pioneering and South Side observations

STARTED: 8/1/05

CONTACT: The Woodlawn Wonder Natasha_Chicago@yahoo.com

TWITTER: WoodlawnWonder

How we built and ranked our list of online news publications

Our survey seeks to highlight some of the emerging local online news publications. That means that we have avoided most established metropolitan news organizations' online publications. In no way does this mean that they are not of major importance to local news coverage (or that they are not leaders in innovation in their own right).

In fact, if we had included them in our rankings they would easily have filled the top slots with their large audiences and professional operations. Given the time and resources available to us and our goal of learning more about the potential for online publications to stimulate better local news coverage, we decided our survey should meet the following objectives:

1. To foreground new and innovative online news publications in Chicago, we wanted to focus on the small and emerging host of blogs, news sites, and other Web 2.0 entrepreneurs providing opportunities for new voices and new ways of covering communities to flourish.

2. To get a sense of who they are, how they envision their audience, what kind of content they provide, and how they are organized—for example, whether they consider their endeavor a hobby, a business, or something in between.

3. To be as inclusive as possible in cataloguing such sites.

4. Given our interest in local news, we prioritized community newspapers, blogs and other sites from the neighborhoods, and original voices on arts and culture. We also decided to include, both for comparison purposes and because we thought they were exemplary, some content from traditional newspapers.

major determinant—and size is just one of many ways to measure influence. We used various measures of engagement. Some came from publication owners, who reported, on the honor system, numbers of subscribers via online syndication (such as RSS, Really Simple Syndication, and E-mail), and time spent on their Web site. We also used third-party indicators to measure influence.

- **Technical proficiency:** While we are not believers in using every Web 2.0 bell and whistle, we valued interesting and innovative uses of these tools—and wanted to gauge which Web 2.0 tools are most popular. We also valued

- **Transparency:** One of the biggest challenges we faced was the novelty of practically everything connected to online news publications—including expectations and culture around sharing information such as traffic data. While we recognize some legitimate concerns about maintaining proprietary data, we also believe some basic traffic information is essential to help everyone understand the emerging online news marketplace. The relatively small audiences of many of the sites we were tracking made this even more important, since we found third-party sites that track traffic and other indicators to be less reliable for smaller sites. A second important dimension to transparency that we valued was the ability to look at a site and understand who had created it and how to contact them. In fact, many smaller sites lacked a clear profile, contact person, or feedback method.

Those were our goals and assumptions when we first sent out the surveys. In the end, 93 individuals filled them out.[1] After eliminating duplicates (for example, when two people from the same organization responded), editing out sites that

One of the biggest challenges we faced was the novelty of practically everything connected to online news publications—including expectations and culture around sharing information such as traffic data.

These goals were informed by assumptions we made about best practices online. In addition to accurate, entertaining and informative content (of course), we focused on three best practices:

- **Influence:** How widely known is the publication? Although as previously stated we did not feel audience size was a

did not originate from or focus on Chicago (such as In These Times, New America Media and the Champaign/Urbana Independent Media Center—excellent sites that we ultimately decided were beyond the scope of the survey), we edited this down to a list of 84 sites. It's important to note that we are far from considering this list the best or the only online news

publications in Chicagoland: we restricted ourselves to ranking those we were able to survey within the time available to collect our data. In fact, there are some significant sites, such as Huffington Post Chicago, that did not respond and so are not included.

We would have liked to collect data on even more publications (in fact we compiled a list of more than 200; some were major media sites that we decided not to include, others were approached but did not respond to our survey). We hope to continue this process, gathering and cataloging new publications that emerged as we were completing our process, and others we learned of too late to include them. Similarly, space limitations keep us from displaying everything we learned in the printed report. Sixty of the sites we surveyed are listed here; the rest of the 84 as well as the larger list of sites we identified but did not survey will be shared online at www.communitymediaworkshop.org/newnews.

Gathering data

In advance of the Chicago Journalism Town Hall on February 22, we prepared a three-page list of noteworthy online sources of local news.[2] This ranged from the Active Transportation Alliance to the Zoo Plane, as well as online news publications from other organizations, individuals and reporters at established newspapers and magazines. From there, we drafted a fresh list of Web sites to survey for a closer look at the makeup of emerging online news in Chicago.

We invited respondents to recommend new Web sites to us, and to pass along the survey to people at other relevant, local online publications. As we learned of relevant new online news publications we contacted the people behind them with invitations to complete our survey.

Nearly a dozen blogs provided no clue about the identity of the people behind them or how to contact them. We got creative in our investigations, attempting to send a survey request by commenting on their stories. (We even followed some on Twitter in a mostly unsuccessful attempt to send a direct message.)

As we collected responses over several weeks, we followed up by calling non-respondents by telephone and sending them additional reminders via e-mail. With the help of Ken Davis, organizer of the Chicago Journalism Town Hall event, we were able to do one final round of gathering online news publications when we surveyed Town Hall attendees asking for their feedback on our list so far, to let us know what we had missed, and to share a link to the survey.
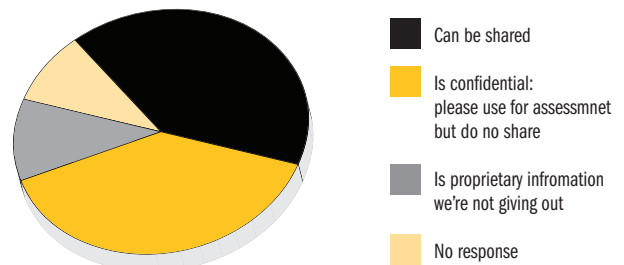
In exchange for completing a survey, we offered each respondent the choice of a $10 gift card from either Intelligentsia or Caribou Coffee. Many respondents waived the gift card and

opted to consider their response a donation to the Workshop.

The survey was completed online, via Survey Monkey. We sent out the first invitation Monday, April 22 and the final response was received Saturday, May 23. We had 26 people respond to our direct invitation; 56 responded to an email link to the survey that they received either from Community Media Workshop or a colleague, and 11 responded to a different link and were re-entered in our final Survey Monkey survey by hand. The latter group included a number of testers who graciously agreed to help us debug the final draft of the survey.

Confidentiality

Information about our audience

- Can be shared
- Is confidential: please use for assessmnet but do no share
- Is proprietary infromation we're not giving out
- No response

Among other issues we had to deal with was one related to confidentiality and sharing of data. A small group of respondents declined to share their data at all. In some cases, we followed up to request they change their minds; in other cases we evaluated them as best we could using the data available to us. A larger number were willing to share their data with us but not with the world.

Respondents who did not feel comfortable sharing their data widely indicated that this was primarily for business reasons. This also presented a challenge when it came time to analyze the data, which will be discussed in the next section.

Analyzing the data

We aimed to combine industry standard tools for measuring Web site popularity with our own, more subjective assessment of each site's local relevance and quality. To that end, we created an algorithm loosely based on that of Todd Andrlik's Power 150 ranking of marketing blogs.[3] Our rankings took into account six criteria for each publication, as the following table shows.

Six criteria for new news rankings

SOURCE	1 POINT	2 POINTS	3 POINTS	4 POINTS	5 POINTS
Self reported subscribers via RSS (and e-mail)	0 (no email subscribers)	1 –30 (1,000 emails)	31–75 (2,000 emails)	76–250 (3,000 emails)	251+ (larger email lists)
Self-reported visitors monthly	Less than 1,000	1001–5000	5001–20,000	20,001–50,000	50,000+
Self-reported time on site	Less than 2 minutes	2–5 minutes	5–10 minutes	10–20 minutes	20+ minutes
Google Page Rank	1	2	3	4–5	6+
Alexa traffic rank	(Not used)	None	Millions	Hundreds of thousands	Tens of thousands or less
Community Media Workshop Score	Subjective score based on factors such as local news coverage, community-oriented, original or unique; frequent updates; transparency; strong design; use of social media tools				

We translated each of the above six results above into a 5-point scale, as the chart above explains. Web sites with the greatest final scores floated to the top of the rankings. Of the six dimensions on which we rated publications, three were based on information survey respondents provided to us, two were derived from third-party Web sites (Google and Alexa.com), and one was a subjective assessment by the Workshop. Descriptions of each dimension follow:

1. **Self reported subscribers via RSS (and e-mail):** one measure of engagement we examined was how many subscribers—people who had requested information from the sites, either via RSS or email (because relatively few sites had strong RSS data, and because this technology appears to remain relatively opaque to many, we opted to supplement it with Email information).

2. **Self-reported unique monthly visitors:** We asked sites to report the number of visitors they had received in March 2009; we also asked them to tell us what tool they were using to measure such information. Google analytics and various proprietary tools were the most common responses.

3. **Self-reported time on site:** The same analytics programs that provided unique monthly visitor data were able to provide average time on site data.

4. **Google Page Rank:** This indicates, among other things, the popularity of a Web site according to the number of other sites that it links to or that link to it.[4]

5. **Alexa traffic rank:** Alexa helped us to determine where a site fit in relative to all other U.S. Internet sites. While there were some challenges with using it—notably its inability to track sub domains (Web URLs with multiple forward slashes in them, for example)—we determined that it was the most accurate of a range of such tools available to us that we auditioned for tracking tasks, such as Compete.com and Quantcast.com.[5]

6. **Community Media Workshop Score:** The Workshop Score reflects each Web site's unique local relevance, originality, quality of content, frequency of updates, openness to story pitches, design and use of social media tools. The Workshop Score averages rankings from individual staff members of the Workshop.

Our algorithm relies heavily upon figures provided by each Web site. We decided to abide by an honor code, trusting survey respondents to provide figures that were accurate to the best of their knowledge. It also penalized respondents who chose not to respond, whether out of confidentiality or other concerns. Specifically, publications that did not provide responses for the first three dimensions of the assessment received a 1 on these dimensions. We informed respondents of this when they took the survey: "Please note that the data will be used as part of an algorithm we've developed to help clarify the new, local news ecology," ran information immediately preceding questions about number of visitors and time spent on site. "If we don't have traffic data from you, your Web site may rank lower than other comparable sites on the final list."

We were generally unsatisfied with the third-party tools available for measuring influence and engagement over the Internet. These standards are the best we have, and probably as imperfect as traditional means of measuring the circulation of print publications. We also had to abandon early attempts at measuring RSS and e-mail subscribers with third-party tools, whose results were difficult to look up and seemingly unreliable. And although we aimed initially to include Technorati Authority in the algorithm, that tool was largely inoperable during the crucial weeks of survey collection.

1 Unfortunately, the survey is too long to fit in the printed report. A copy can be viewed online at bit.ly/PTSD0.

2 See chijournalismtownhall.com. The original three-page list is downloadable at communitymediaworkshop.org/download/onlineNewsList.pdf.

3 For Tod Andrlik's methodology, see adage.com/power150/about

4 See www.google.com/corporate/tech.html

5 See alexa.com

Subscribers Self-Reported

	Email subscribers	RSS Subscribers	RSS/Email subscribers Score (site's report)
Daywatch: Chicago Tribune	60,000	No answer	5
Art Letter	15,025	No answer	5
Bronzecomm	15,000	No answer	5
Windy City Media Group	10,500	No answer	5
Midwest Business	10,000	No answer	5
Chi-Town Daily News	5,000	No answer	5
Community Media Workshop	4,500	50	5
The Chicago Reporter	4,000	100	5
Gapers Block	1,750	5,200	5
Progress Illinois	1,000	300	5
The Urbanophile	121	562	5
ArchPundit	5	200	4
Broad Shoulders Update	No answer	105	4
Chicago News Bench	No answer	130	4
Chicagoist Podcast	No answer	150-200	4
Southwest Observer	50	50	4
Green Parent Chicago	18	18	3
The Beachwood Reporter	2,000	No answer	3

These tables display online news publications that were rated highly on one or more of these six dimensions of our algorithm.

Visitors (March 2009) Self-Reported

	Self-reported visitors March 2009	Self-reported visitors score
Chi-Town Daily News	50,000 plus	5
Gapers Block	50,000 plus	5
greg hinz blog @ chicagobusiness.com	50,000 plus	5
Inside Online	50,000 plus	5
Marathon Pundit	50,000 plus	5
McHenry County Blog	50,000 plus	5
Progress Illinois	50,000 plus	5
Windy City Media Group	50,000 plus	5
Bronzecomm	20,001 to 50,000	4
Chicago Defender	20,001 to 50,000	4
District 299	20,001 to 50,000	4
Ferdy on Films, etc.	20,001 to 50,000	4
Hello Beautiful!	20,001 to 50,000	4
ArchPundit	5,001 to 20,000	3
Art Letter	5,001 to 20,000	3
Chicago News Bench	5,001 to 20,000	3
Edgewater Community Buzz	5,001 to 20,000	3
Southwest Observer	5,001 to 20,000	3
The Beachwood Reporter	5,001 to 20,000	3
The Urbanophile	5,001 to 20,000	3

Time on Site Self-Reported

	Self-reported time on site (minutes)	Self-reported time score
Green Parent Chicago	10 to 20	4
Windy City Media Group	10 to 20	4
District 299	5 to 10	3
Marathon Pundit	5 to 10	3
Art Letter	2 to 5	2
Broad Shoulders Update	2 to 5 minutes	2
Chi-Town Daily News	2 to 5	2
Chicago Defender	2 to 5	2
Chicago News Bench	2 to 5	2
Chicago Tech News	2 to 5 minutes	2
Claretian Associates	2 to 5	2
Community Media Workshop	2 to 5	2
Gapers Block	2 to 5	2
greg hinz blog @ chicago-business.com	2 to 5	2
Hyde Park Progress	2 to 5	2
Inside Online	2 to 5	2
Midwest Business	2 to 5	2
Near West Side Community Development Corporation	2 to 5	2
Neighborhood Sports Chicago	2 to 5 minutes	2
New Communities	2 to 5	2
Progress Illinois	2 to 5	2
Sloopin	2 to 5 minutes	2
Southwest Observer	2 to 5	2
The Beachwood Reporter	2 to 5	2
The Resurrection Project	2 to 5 minutes	2
The South Chicagoan	2 to 5 minutes	2
The Urbanophile	2 to 5	2
The Zoo Plane	2 to 5 minutes	2

Alexa.com Site Rank

	Alexa Traffic Rank	Alexa Score
Daywatch: Chicago Tribune	Chicago Tribune overall 1,087	5
Lynn Sweet	Sun-Times overall 2,410	5
The Ride	Sun-Times overall 2,410	5
Outside.In	Outside.In overall 15,384	5
Chicago Metblogs	20,188	5
EveryBlock	30,605	5
Chicago Reader	36,645	5
Chicagoist	52,026	5
greg hinz blog @ chicagobusiness.com	Crain's overall 53,321	5
Windy Citizen	71,426	5
WBEZ Chicago Public Radio	105,955	4
Gapers Block	119,918	4
Chi-Town Daily News	124,301	4
Chicago Magazine online	141,405	4
The Printed Blog	151,383	4
McHenry County Blog	225,882	4
Catalyst Chicago	360,513	4
Illinois Review	370,120	4
Progress Illinois	375,052	4
The Beachwood Reporter	380,329	4
Windy City Media Group	412,987	4
Chicago Parent	432,626	4
Chicago Defender	440,190	4
Ferdy on Films, etc.	448,207	4
Marathon Pundit	527,773	4
Chicago Journal	548,115	4
Newcity	722,083	4
YoChicago	791,254	4
Vocalo.org	865,139	4
Inside Online	899,308	4
ModeShift: Active Transportation Alliance	913,818	4
Midwest Business	964,205	4
CTA Tattler	977,226	4

Google Page Rank

	Google PageRank	Google PageRank score
Chicago Magazine online	7	5
Chicagoist	7	5
EveryBlock	7	5
WBEZ Chicago Public Radio	7	5
600 Words by Esther J. Cepeda	6	5
Catalyst Chicago	6	5
Chi-Town Daily News	6	5
Chicago Carless	6	5
Chicago Defender	6	5
Chicago Journal	6	5
Chicago Justice Blog	6	5
CTA Tattler	6	5
District 299	6	5
Gapers Block	6	5
Hello Beautiful!	6	5
Hyde Park Progress	6	5
Literago	6	5
Midwest Business	6	5
Mindful Metropolis	6	5
New Communities	6	5
Progress Illinois	6	5
The Beachwood Reporter	6	5
The Chicago Reporter	6	5
The Printed Blog	6	5
The Urbanophile	6	5

CMW Score

	Average CMW Score
Catalyst Chicago	5
Chi-Town Daily News	5
Chicago Defender	5
Chicago Journal	5
District 299	5
Gapers Block	5
New Communities	5
The Beachwood Reporter	5
The Chicago Reporter	5
WBEZ Chicago Public Radio	5
Chicago Magazine online	4
Daywatch: Chicago Tribune	4
McHenry County Blog	4
Midwest Business	4
Progress Illinois	4
Chicago Reader	4
Community Media Workshop	4
greg hinz blog @ chicagobusiness.com	4
Southwest Observer	4
The Hinsdalean	4
Windy City Media Group	4
Chicago Carless	4
Chicago Parent	4

What about the mainstream media?

Our purpose was not to examine the largest online news publications in the Chicago area. In fact, we biased our investigation toward small and innovative online news sites. Had we included local print and broadcast home pages, these would likely have occupied many of the top 25 to top 30 slots in our rankings. For reference, here are 15 of those sites with their Alexa traffic rank, where available:

NAME	URL	ALEXA RANK
Chicago Tribune	www.chicagotribune.com	1087
Chicago Sun-Times	www.suntimes.com	2410
Chicago Breaking News Center	www.chicagobreakingnews.com/blog/	13835
Daily Herald	www.dailyherald.com	17722
WBBM-TV	www.cbs2chicago.com	26956
WMAQ-TV	www.nbcchicago.com/news	29191
SouthtownStar	www.southtownstar.com	54457
WBBM-AM	www.wbbm780.com	65014
WFLD-TV	www.myfoxchicago.com	78777
WGN-AM	www.wgnradio.com	138279
WLS-AM	www.wlsam.com	142905
WTTW-TV/ Chicago Tonight	www.wttw.com/main.taf?p=1,4	233630
WLS-TV	abclocal.go.com/wls/index	NA (subdomain of go.com)
WGN-TV	www.wgntv.com	NA (subdomain of tribune.com)
CLTV	www.cltv.com	NA (subdomain of tribune.com)

More online news publications

In the course of gathering online news publications, we came across and were impressed by the following but did not get to survey them for one reason or another:

A Chicago Blog, www.achicagoblog.com

AREA Chicago, www.areachicago.org

Avondale and Logan Square Crime Blotter, avondalelogansquarecrime.blogspot.com

Broken Heart of Rogers Park, morsehellhole.blogspot.com

Capitol Fax, thecapitolfaxblog.com

Centerstage, www.centerstagechicago.com

Chi-Town Living, www.chitownliving.com

Chicago Boyz, chicagoboyz.net

Chicago Daily Observer, www.cdobs.com

Chicago Gallery News, www.chicagogallerynews.com

Chicago Gangs, chicagogangs.org

Chicago Independent Media Center, chicago.indymedia.org

Chicago Jewish News, chicagojewishnews.com

Chicago Moms Blog, www.svmomblog.typepad.com/chicago_moms

Chicago Reader Clout City, blogs.chicagoreader.com/politics

Chicago Tribune Clout Street, newsblogs.chicagotribune.com/clout_st

Chicago Tribune: Exploring Race, newsblogs.chicagotribune.com/race

Chicago's Best Blogs, chicagosbestblogs.com

City of Destiny, cityofdestiny.blogspot.com

CityNews Chicago, www.newschicago.org

Daily Herald Animal Farm, blogs.dailyherald.com/blog/16

Eric Zorn: Change of Subject, blogs.chicagotribune.com/news_columnists_ezorn

Flying Debris, flyingdebris.blogspot.com

Green Bean Chicago, www.greenbeanchicago.com

Heartland Journal, www.heartlandcafe.com/hj_index.htm

HispanicPro, www.hispanicpro.com

Huffington Post Chicago, www.huffingtonpost.com/chicago

IlliniPundit (Champaign), www.illinipundit.com

Illinoize, capitalfax.blogspot.com

Invisible Institute, invisibleinstitute.com

Local Tourist, www.thelocaltourist.com

Lumpen Times, lumpentimes.blogspot.com

Marshfield Tattler, marshfieldtattler.blogspot.com

Medill Reports, news.medill.northwestern.edu/chicago

Michael Miner: News Bites, blogs.chicagoreader.com/news-bites

Nitty Gritty News, nittygrittynewschicago.com

North Lawndale Community News, www.nlcn.org/web/cms

Pitchfork, www.pitchfork.com

Prairie State Blue, www.prairiestateblue.com

Proximity Magazine, www.proximitymagazine.com

PURE Parents, www.pureparents.org/?blog/category/3

Radio Islam, www.radioislam.com

Radio Tiki, www.radiotiki.com

Second City Cop, secondcitycop.blogspot.com

The Dome, thedome.sj-r.com

The Expired Meter, theexpiredmeter.com

Time Out Chicago, chicago.timeout.com

Today's Chicago Woman, www.tcwmag.com

Trib Local, triblocal.com

YourStreet, www.yourstreet.com/news/chicago-il

Our Information needs:
Vetted, shared, selected news

The shift from traditional to online news publications provides a glimpse into individuals' views on what they love and hate about the news and, more broadly, their perspectives on their information needs.

David Marzahl, Center for Economic Progress

We focused on how changes in the news business affect communities, arts and culture, and other aspects of public life. We discussed the topic with leaders of area nonprofit organizations that offer often-untapped expertise on this topic: leaders of nonprofit organizations working on the broadest possible range of issues, of all budget sizes and types, from emerging organizations to agencies whose founding dates to the 19th century. (See list of participants and methodology in Appendix.) We wanted to get three kinds of information from the focus groups:

1. **What is the value of news to you or your organization and your relationship to news as a news user and a source?**

2. **To what extent you feel more or less informed and connected to peers and to the region as a whole?**

3. **What is the state of your own operations relative to producing and disseminating information, whether to inform, advocate or persuade, fundraise, or other goals?**

We framed the focus groups with short presentations about the state of the news, following the outline of the previous section of this report. From the four

75-minute conversations that ensued these key topics emerged:

> ### Gravity of news changes
>
> ### Core News Function 1:
> Vetting
>
> ### Core News Function 2:
> Selection
>
> ### Core News Function 3:
> One conversation
>
> ### Our capacity to respond

We also asked people to discuss in some detail their habits of news consumption, with extra attention paid to what new online news sites they use.

Gravity of situation

"I think the accumulated absence of all that writing and reading is something we haven't begun to imagine"

Given our invitation process, it's perhaps no surprise that everyone who attended expressed concern about the state of the news. At the most global

level, participants expressed their belief that the existing method of local news coverage is broken. One consequence of this overall breakdown of local news coverage, a social-service agency part-time communications staffer noted, was the need to embrace online and Web 2.0 communication methods:

"You have to get involved with the Internet and blogging if you're really going to stay alive and keep your organization alive."

Several participants noted that key reporters with whom they had relationships had been laid off recently. One said a journalist had recently completed reporting for a story on her organization, but was laid off before the story could be published. This loss was reflected on the *Tribune* editorial page in the form of less space for letters to the editor from nonprofits, a participant noted: *"I think we have been trying just as much, but not getting published as often."*

There was agreement among participants that levels of news coverage have been decreasing gradually over time, as opposed to recently and rapidly. For example, arts-organization participants had a spirited discussion about the extent to which reviews and other coverage help drive event attendance.

A representative from Kohl Children's Museum suggested that over the years there'd been a "tectonic shift" since 2005, when the museum moved from Evanston to Glenview:

> [Then] an article hit and you could see a huge jump in zip codes of that territory almost immediately....Since then I don't remember what a big hit looks like. When you're in the big papers, the Trib, the Sun-Times, it tends to be a listing about a new exhibit and you get a paragraph or two...instead of a big meaty article. And so what I'm finding is instead of these one big hits every once in a while, it's trying to get 100 little hits into these little blogs and little smaller local papers.

Conversely, a theater group participant reported that after her group received a review, she was told to expect the phones to ring off the hook, but they never did, she noted: *"I have been there for six months, and we have had two shows, and the reviews don't sell tickets even if they are good."*

Participants also said they had noticed the difference in local news coverage as individual news consumers and users. Responding partly to our own focus on the *Sun-Times* and *Tribune*, most reflected experiences as *Tribune* subscribers. They dismissed recent changes in the print newspaper with strongly unfavorable comments, such as calling it "fluff," "lightweight" and cartoonish.

Another level of concern stemmed from the ease of handling the physical newspaper and the loss of associations with the experience of consuming news. We did not ask participants for their age, but this appeared to come mostly from participants over the age of 40. For example, participants noted the ease of carrying paper along with them, the ritual of starting the day with breakfast and a newspaper, and even the "smell and feel" of the paper.

Finally, it was instructive to note specific instances of journalists and journalism that mattered to participants in the focus groups. These were worth noting partly because they pointed up nonprofit leaders' dual role as news users and as sources. In several cases as noted below, nonprofit participants

said they had sourced a report for specific stories or journalists, while in other cases participants praised the story or reporter:

- *Chicago Tribune* current or former reporters Charles Storch, Lisa Black, Barbara Mahany, Steve Franklin
- *Sun-Times* editorials on schools and about violence in the schools
- *Tribune* series on domestic violence
- *Tribune* ongoing reports on health care (specifically, pieces by Judith Graham)
- General support for reports on state corruption and Dantrell Davis
- Investigative stories on social issues by the *Chicago Reporter*
- ABC-7 series on universal design at Kohl Children's Museum
- Foreclosure crisis stories in partnership with an advocacy organization

Participants also saw the opportunity in online news publications. For example several cited media relations successes using Twitter and other Web 2.0 tools. A participant who contributes to Gapers Block noted: *"I think there's so many more people writing about the arts who may not have the backing of a major paper that I'm kind of like, well, that's cool."*

Vetting

I'm getting a lot more information, but the source is dubious.

Online publications were widely perceived to be less authoritative than traditional news outlets. There was clear consensus that participants missed editing, vetting and fact checking provided by editorial staff at traditional media outlets.

This did not mean that participants felt that traditional print news was less biased. Rather, while they accept that bias is built into any story or report —they are already familiar with and understand the biases of existing news outlets. But these biases remain unknown for online news publications.

Selection

Another role of traditional news participants perceived online news publica-

They dismissed recent changes in the print newspaper with strongly unfavorable comments, such as calling it "fluff," "lightweight" and cartoonish.

tions failing to perform can be summed up by the old *New York Times'* tagline, "All the News That's Fit to Print." Most group members appreciated the diversity of information available to them online, but at the same time felt overwhelmed by that diversity. In fact, given the infinite-seeming variation of offerings online, participants esteemed traditional news' guide function. Specifically they appreciated journalists' ability to:

- **Select what's most important.** This kind of selection was critical and will be presented in greater detail in the next section.
- **Select news or stories that surprise or are of interest.** For example, several people cited the Tuesday Science Times as an example of traditional journalists selecting and publishing stories our members might not otherwise ever have known about—let alone how to find them online—but that they found interesting.

One participant noted, *"If you read a newspaper, it's kind of like eating a balanced diet"* as opposed to online news.

Also in this context the form of print news came up numerous times when group members noted that they found it easier to "discover" stories of interest to them flipping through a print newspaper. "Truthfully, I find going through the paper like this a lot easier than reading on line," an individual said, speaking for many in the group.

One conversation

Who's pulling it all together and making sense of it, like giving the big picture?

It may be natural to long for someone else to winnow and select the most relevant, interesting, and best news and stories in the face of the diversity available from online news publications. But many focus group members identified another aspect of traditional news, that of referee, arbiter or gatekeeper. That role, *"in a sense, to set the agenda for the region as a whole,"* as one participant put it, was prized by participants who want to feel that they are part of one conversation across the region.

Among the focus groups, issue advocates in particular highlighted the role of the news in pulling together a swath of topical information and news. The single-issue advocates noted that in their work they focus on just one issue, and the role of the news is to look more broadly across a whole range of topics.

An advocate, who lives in Evanston but works downtown, noted that with the advent some time previously of zoning (the practice of adapting content for one part of a newspaper's delivery area, to emphasize local news), she perceived that her Evanston-delivered *Tribune* includes less news about the South Side, identifying this loss of "one conversation" as part of a process that has been going on for a long time.

In this phase of our focus group conversations, participants echoed the concept of the information commons —news of interest to multiple individuals by virtue of sharing the same broad geographic community, for example. They felt greater connection to and

10 Most-cited Outlets Among 4 Focus Groups
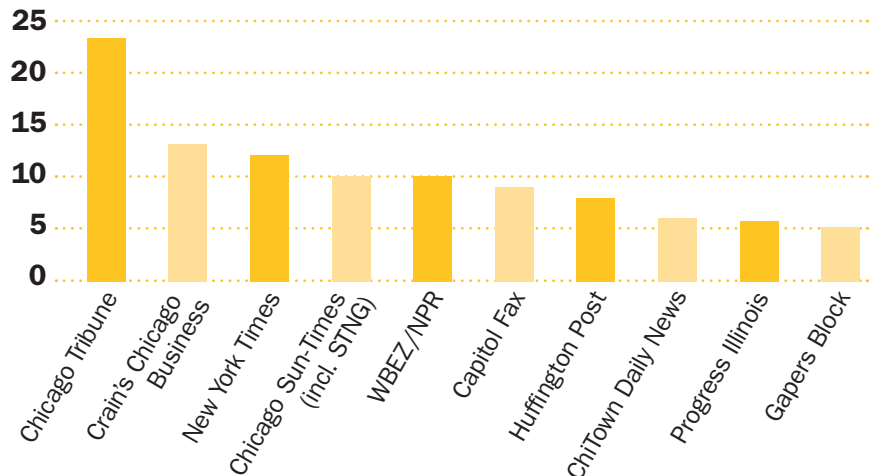
better communication "laterally" among themselves and other organizations, e.g. peer groups, national associations, or even international entities. But they viewed these conversations as potentially less reliable because they did not come from "neutral sources," as one person put it. In other words, as news consumers, participants said they want someone who does not necessarily agree with them or even see the world the same way to provide them with news and information.

Finally, it's worth noting that from a media relations point of view alone, participants found this very diversity and churn on the Web a challenge, as it makes for more relationships to keep track of and information needs to be constantly updated.

Our capacity to respond

Capacity challenges came up for a number of groups. For example, at least two people specified they had laid off communications and marketing staff recently.

Most had dipped a toe into the online social media pool. Virtually all participants had organizational Web sites. Many had a sense of the metrics of who and how many visitors come to those sites, and a surprising number of all but the largest nonprofits had scaled back or even abandoned print communication vehicles, including newsletters and annual reports.

A number of people expressed the feeling they were "getting the hang

of" social media. They also noted that despite decreases in news coverage overall, the economic crisis and advent of the Obama administration with its increased attention to domestic issues seemed to be driving greater attention to their organizations and issues.

In the course of the focus group process, we shared with participants our list-in-formation of online news publications to get a sense of the news diet of nonprofit leaders and gauge their familiarity with these publications. We also aimed to identify those with the broadest reach—those that approximate the greatest "one conversation" nature of traditional news. In the course of the meetings of the four focus groups, participants cited specific news outlets some 156 times. The 10 most-cited outlets among the four focus groups are illustrated in the chart above.

Conclusion

We were surprised at the degree to which individuals were able to identify the core functions of news that they valued most. We also found that individuals appeared relatively prepared to make the jump to online news—if it is able to fulfill the three key roles of vetting, selection, and garnering the kind of broad regional audiences that the *Tribune* and *Sun-Times*, for example, already command.

Information super highways and the future of communication

BY GREG SANDERS

In 2009, few people still doubt the importance of the Internet. Some of the promises made by the Web's proponents 20 years ago still seem far-fetched, but in many ways the Web has delivered on its promise.

Adoption rates for Web technologies are high in the most economically developed countries, and uptake is trickling into the developing world. Useful Web applications have followed, in some cases enabling substantial gains in worker productivity and consumer satisfaction. And as we are increasingly aware, the Web has diverted much of the attention that was once held by traditional media including print, radio and network television.

But there's a nagging feeling in the technology industry that the Web we know and love is no more than the tip of a very large iceberg. Could we be on the verge of something that would make today's Internet seem almost trivial?

Joe Mambretti of the International Center for Advanced Internet Research at Northwestern University believes that the Internet's future value will far exceed its past usefulness. Mambretti and his colleagues are exploring the potential of "super-broadband" that could dramatically improve communications, research, education, manufacturing and medicine.

Super-broadband supports much higher performance and capacity of Internet traffic, allowing high-resolution digital media, for example, to connect research labs, governments, schools, hospitals and workplaces around the world. As a mass communications medium, ubiquitous super-broadband would allow viewers to tune into events and content from an almost infinite number of sources, in real time or plucked from archives, possibly marginalizing traditional news media even further.

While visionaries explore potential uses of super-broadband, others remind us that the Web's most basic uses remain largely untapped today due to limited access in many small towns, rural areas and less affluent urban neighborhoods—areas where almost half our country's population lives.

How can public policy promote the development of next-generation Web technologies and encourage uptake of existing Web resources? Some public officials (including Illinois Governor Patrick Quinn) have worked tenaciously to bridge the digital divide with some success. However, they understand that additional efforts are required. For example, Mambretti notes that a key to promoting access to advanced communications requires reforming the thicket of micro-regulation that was developed for phone services in the 1930s. This type of regulation tends to strangle innovation and growth of the Internet.

Proponents argue that Web communication is to today's economy what transportation technology was during the last century: a core engine of growth, efficiency and competitiveness. Yet transportation, among other sectors, still receives far more attention in the public policy arena. Mambretti recommends a few simple steps that could improve the information infrastructure:

• Designate a single agency to coordinate advanced communications policy in the state.

• Encourage "condominium fiber" infrastructure that can be used by multiple Internet service providers, rather than having each provider implement its own infrastructure, much as condominium owners share a building yet retain control over their individual units. Mambretti compares the current, inefficient situation to every trucking company building its own road into a city.

• Remove everyday obstacles such as the almost insurmountable approval process for running fiber lines beneath railroad tracks in Illinois.

• Streamline the process of acquiring easements on telephone poles and beneath streets.

• Take advantage of existing "dark fiber" lines—unused yet available fiberoptics that have excess capacity.

These and other improvements could make the difference between an Illinois that is ready to compete in the 21st-century economy and one that struggles to keep up.

As Information Architect for the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, Greg Sanders serves as coordinator for the Chicago Area Housing Web site, the Illinois Data Exchange Affiliates and the Full Circle community mapping and planning project. Greg was previously IT Director for the Cleveland Housing Network and Senior Programmer-Analyst for Penske Logistics. He has managed Technology Opportunities Program (TOP) grants in both Cleveland and Chicago. Greg holds a BA in political science from Oberlin College and a Masters degree in mass communications from Kent State.

Super-broadband supports much higher performance and capacity of Internet traffic, allowing high-resolution digital media, for example, to connect research labs, governments, schools, hospitals and workplaces around the world.

Journalism + digital tools = **Neighborhood benefits**

BY PATRICK BARRY

For six years, Local Initiatives Support Corporation of Chicago has been combining traditional journalism with digital tools to support neighborhood development. Our initial premise was that good reporting and writing about the neighborhoods would find an audience and deliver benefits to the communities we covered. We launched a single Web site in 2004 and now support an "ecosystem" of 21 Web sites—many run by the neighborhoods themselves—that attracts more than 26,000 visits per month.

Our work began because newspapers and TV stations didn't do a good job covering the 16 neighborhoods in LISC's New Communities Program. Some, like Englewood or Humboldt Park, showed up in headlines often enough, but usually connected with crime or poverty. Others like Auburn Gresham were virtually invisible to search engines like Google because there were few Web sites or stories to point to.

We were lucky to have long-term support from the MacArthur Foundation, which shared our belief that communications would bring multiple benefits including new funding from other sources. With a budget that has ranged from $300,000 to $450,000 per year, we hired a team of part-time journalists and sent them out to the neighborhoods. Their first assignment was to serve as "scribes" on year-long planning processes in 10 neighborhoods, where they captured the local voice in detailed "quality-of-life" plans. Along with freelance photographers and multimedia specialists, they also developed backgrounders about the neighborhoods and began covering stories about the day-to-day work of improving communities.

More news, more outlets

We knew from the start that the Web would be our main tool of dissemination because it is cheaper than print, reaches an audience far beyond any mailing list, and provides a deep and searchable archive.

What we didn't anticipate was how quickly our information stream would catch on and how demand and opportunities would grow. In the months after NewCommunities.org went live, readers found it, read the few articles we had produced, and began downloading maps, data sheets and other materials by the hundreds. We were filling an information void. And thanks to online search engines, we attracted a wide spectrum of readers: neighborhood residents, academics, city officials, community development practitioners, developers, job-seekers, youth and business owners.

That first Web site, with a small "section" for each neighborhood group, quickly proved inadequate. Our community partners recognized the power of the vivid photography, news stories and online calendars and directories, and began lobbying for their own Web sites. We worked with Webitects Inc. to design an inexpensive yet powerful "grassroots template" and helped eight groups launch Web sites in 2005. Several more have launched since then, and many of the neighborhood agencies have become strong innovators in the digital world.

What we've learned

As the newspaper industry collapses around us, the methods we've developed have become ever more important. By experimenting, copying from each other, and sharing ideas, we've found many low-cost tools that bring tremendous benefits to the neighborhoods. But we also face challenges that limit use of these tools and thus the potential gains. First, the good stuff:

- Neighborhood-oriented news sites run by local organizations can become primary information resources. Top sites in our network attract 2,000 to 4,500 visits per month and have excellent visibility on Google.

- Community groups have shown creativity and leadership in video production and the use of YouTube; photo sharing; e-newsletters; custom mapping; and social networking via Facebook and other sites.

- Training in new-media skills (such as Web site creation and editing, photography, video and e-newsletters) brings rapid and lasting benefits.
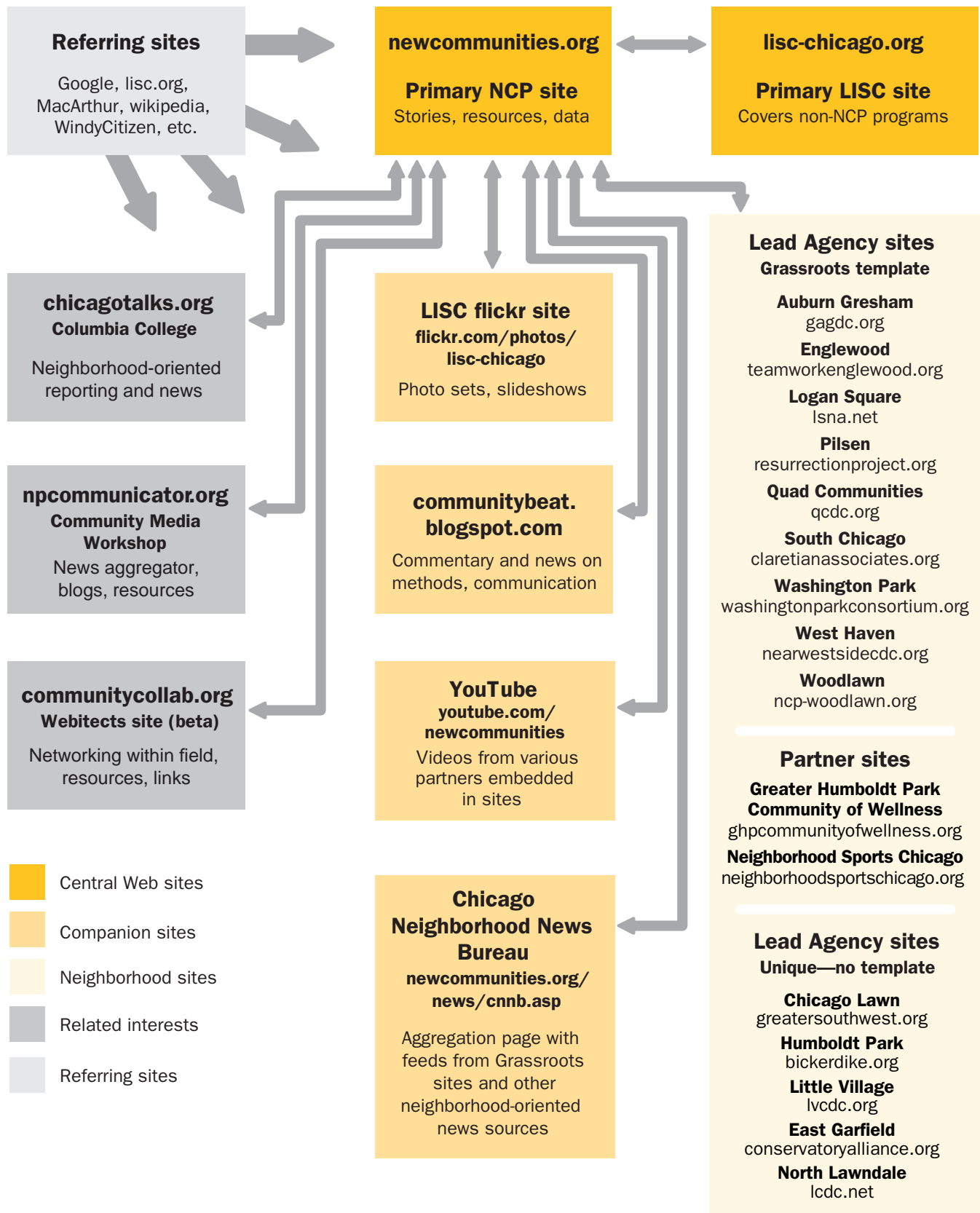
The bad news is that it takes considerable resources to run a news operation, even a limited one focused on a single neighborhood or issue. There's no way around this. Creating a good stream of neighborhood information requires:

- A commitment from the top within the organization or local partnership to invest in communications.

- A staff person or consultant, at least part time, with a storytelling instinct and the will to learn about reporting, writing, photography, editing and Web tools.

- An organizing mentality that uses the news operation to support the objectives and strategies of the organization or neighborhood.

- Money to do these things over a period of years, because it takes time to build skills, participate in trainings and find a rhythm.

Digital tools offer tremendous promise to support healthy communities. But the tools alone do nothing. Like the newsprint and presses they replace, they are merely a vehicle. If communities want to reap the benefits of the digital age, they must learn to collect, shape and disseminate information with a professional, journalistic approach.

Patrick Barry has been writing about Chicago neighborhoods for 28 years. He has written about urban issues for the Chicago Sun-Times, Chicago Magazine, Chicago Enterprise *and many other publications. More recently, Barry created a journalism-based documentation program for LISC/Chicago's New Communities Program (NCP), the nation's largest demonstration of comprehensive community development. Barry developed the NCP "scribe" program over the past seven years, managing a team of 10 contracted writers, photographers, designers, videographers and a Web services provider. The NCP program has launched 14 new Web sites and a blog, Community Beat, that cover neighborhoods and community development.*

An "Ecosystem" of News Sites
Focused on Community Development

Referring sites

Google, lisc.org, MacArthur, wikipedia, WindyCitizen, etc.

newcommunities.org

Primary NCP site
Stories, resources, data

lisc-chicago.org

Primary LISC site
Covers non-NCP programs

chicagotalks.org
Columbia College

Neighborhood-oriented reporting and news

npcommunicator.org
Community Media Workshop

News aggregator, blogs, resources

communitycollab.org
Webitects site (beta)

Networking within field, resources, links

LISC flickr site
flickr.com/photos/lisc-chicago

Photo sets, slideshows

communitybeat.blogspot.com

Commentary and news on methods, communication

YouTube
youtube.com/newcommunities

Videos from various partners embedded in sites

Chicago Neighborhood News Bureau
newcommunities.org/news/cnnb.asp

Aggregation page with feeds from Grassroots sites and other neighborhood-oriented news sources

Lead Agency sites
Grassroots template

Auburn Gresham
gagdc.org

Englewood
teamworkenglewood.org

Logan Square
lsna.net

Pilsen
resurrectionproject.org

Quad Communities
qcdc.org

South Chicago
claretianassociates.org

Washington Park
washingtonparkconsortium.org

West Haven
nearwestsidecdc.org

Woodlawn
ncp-woodlawn.org

Partner sites

Greater Humboldt Park Community of Wellness
ghpcommunityofwellness.org

Neighborhood Sports Chicago
neighborhoodsportschicago.org

Lead Agency sites
Unique—no template

Chicago Lawn
greatersouthwest.org

Humboldt Park
bickerdike.org

Little Village
lvcdc.org

East Garfield
conservatoryalliance.org

North Lawndale
lcdc.net

- Central Web sites
- Companion sites
- Neighborhood sites
- Related interests
- Referring sites

Focus group methodology

Jennifer Lacey, Graduate Journalism Student; Hope Daniels, Columbia College Radio Departmebt; Jeff Bierig, Illinois Insitute of Technology; Bob Yovovich, Journalist

We decided the best way to gauge trends and assumptions about news users, our region's information needs, and news-business successes and challenges was to work with on an audience we feel is particularly relevant but not particularly well-represented in the larger discussion about where local news is headed.

We focused on how changes in the news business affect communities, arts and culture, and other aspects of public life and to discuss the topic with leaders of area nonprofit organizations that offer often-untapped expertise on this topic: leaders of nonprofit organizations working on the broadest possible range of issues, of all budget sizes and types, from emerging organizations to agencies whose founding dates to the 19th century.

We took advantage of The Chicago Community Trust's breadth of philanthropic support in the region by organizing our invitees around the Trust's program areas:

• Arts and Culture
• Basic Human Needs
• Community Development
• Education
• Health

We used the Trust's 2007 annual report to identify funded organizations in these program areas.[1] Then we crossed that with organizations with which Community Media Workshop already had a relationship (the vast majority), and invited 92 mostly executive directors and senior communications or development staff. These invites yielded 4 focus groups with a total of 33 participants held April 7, April 9, April 14, and April 16 in a conference room on Columbia College Chicago's campus.

Because we wanted to dive right into the content and to give participants some tangible benefits for attending, we began by presenting some of our news keyword findings (described in the chapter "How Did We Get Here?") and gave them copies of our online news publication list in formation. Following the discussions and to satisfy our need to complete a business plan for Community Media Workshop's own online news efforts, our consultants Mark Miller and Bob Yovovich led a discussion and sought feedback on plans for that effort.

Discussion Guide

PART I: Establish participants' relationship/connection to local news

1. How much have you been following the troubles of the news business?

2. Talk a bit about your personal news habits:

   a. How do you get your news? TV/newspaper-paper/newspaper-online?/what sources?

   b. Would you say you use online news: not-at-all/for local news/for national news?

   c. Which of these do you recognize/visit (hand out list of online news sources and URLs)

PART II: Focus on participants' organizations relation to the news

1. Please tell us what your general experience is with getting news coverage about:

   a. The issues you work on

   b. Your organization's work

2. How has this changed in recent years?

3. Talk about your capacity to spread the word about your organization/your issues?

   a. High/medium/low/very low

4. Please tell us what your general experience is with using social media/integrating online tools to spread the word about:

   a. The issues you work on

   a. Your organization's work

Part III: Focus on what participants would like to see (the news we want and need)

1. It's been suggested that the Internet brings iwth it a Do-It-Yourself way of doing things (DIY travel, DIY banking, DIY desktop publishing). How ready are you for DIY news?

2. DIY model—using the powerful tools of online communications.

3. Final comments/ thoughts?

1 Downloadable at cct.org/FileDownload.cfm?file=2007%5FAnnualReport%5FComplete%2Epdf Accesssed March 25, 2009

Focus group participants

We'd like to thank the following who gave thoughtful and insightful answers to our questions:

NAME	DATE	TITLE	ORG	SUBJECT	ROLE
Randy Adamsick	7-Apr	Development Director	National Museum of Mexican Art	Arts	Participant
Mairead Case	7-Apr	Assistant Director	Neighborhood Writing Alliance	Arts	Participant
Deb Clapp	7-Apr	Executive Director	League of Chicago Theaters	Arts	Participant
David Jones	7-Apr	Executive Director	Anchor Graphics	Arts	Participant
Dave Judy	7-Apr	Director of Communications	Kohl Children's Museum	Arts	Participant
Jon Pounds	7-Apr	Executive Director	Chicago Public Art Group	Arts	Participant
Katherine Raz	7-Apr	Community Manager	House Theater	Arts	Participant
Alex Montgomery	9-Apr	Director of Communications and Development	Erie Neighborhood House	Basic Human Needs	Participant
Sally Puleo	9-Apr	Program Associate	Fight Crime: Invest in Kids Illinois	Community Development	Participant
Dory Rand	9-Apr	Executive Director	Woodstock Institute	Community Development	Participant
Bernie Ryan	9-Apr	Director of Development	Harborquest,Inc	Community Development	Participant
Gaill Schechter	9-Apr	Executive Director	Interfaith Housing Center of the Northern Suburbs	Community Development	Participant
Joanna VanderWoude	9-Apr	Media Relations Associate	Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law	Basic Human Needs	Participant
Johnathon Briggs	14-Apr	Director of Communications	AIDS Foundation of Chicago	Health	Participant
Elizabeth Condon	14-Apr	Development and Communications Associate	Leap Learning Systems	Education	Participant
Lynne Cunningham	14-Apr	Executive Director	The Enterprising Kitchen	Basic Human Needs	Participant
Sarah Frick	14-Apr	Public Relations Officer	Chicago YWCA	Basic Human Needs	Participant
Robyn Gabel	14-Apr	Executive Director	Illinois Maternal and Child Health Coalition	Health	Participant
Patricia Gross	14-Apr	Executive Director	Metro Chicago Information Center	Health	Participant
Margaret Stapleton	14-Apr	Senior Attorney	Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law	Basic Human Needs	Participant
Hope Daniels	16-Apr	Professor	Columbia College Chicago	N/A	Observer
Gail Fuller	16-Apr	Communications Officer	Rockefeller Bros Fund	N/A	Observer
Jennifer Lacey	16-Apr	Grad Student	Columbia College Chicago	N/A	Observer
Charlie Meyerson	16-Apr	Columnist - Daywatch	Chicago Tribune	N/A	Observer
Jeff Bierig	16-Apr	Director of Media Relations	Illinois Institute of Technology	N/A	Participant
Debbie Bretag	16-Apr	Executive Director	Illinois Center for Violence Provention	N/A	Participant
Jo Ann Dollard	16-Apr	Director of Communications & Public Relations	Lutheran Social Services	N/A	Participant
Nicole Gotthelf	16-Apr	Director of Development	Center for Neighborhood Technology	Community Development	Participant
Mary Lazarikos	16-Apr	Marketing and Communications Manager	Community Support Services	Basic Human Needs	Participant
Mary Lebold	16-Apr	Executive Director	Chicago Bilingual Nurse Consortium	N/A	Participant
David Marzahl	16-Apr	Executive Director	The Center for Economic Progress	Community Development	Participant
Sheila Rotman	16-Apr	Dir. of Marketing & Communications	Albany Park Community Center	N/A	Participant
Katty Salgado	16-Apr	Director of Communications	Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights	Basic Human Needs	Participant
Mark Miller	All	Consultant	550 Plus Digital	N/A	Observer
Bob Yovovich	All	Consultant	550 Plus Digital	N/A	Observer

Acknowledgements