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Basic web 2.0 tools for online media

The new Web 2.0 tools offer newspapers and online newspaper sites new ways to measure performance and engage with an audience. In this white paper, Susan Mernit, social media and online news consultant, shares information and tips about some of the free and low cost tools innovative news organizations are using—and that can work for your local media property as well.

The top 5 tools you will learn about and find out how to get started with:

- Google Analytics
- Google AdSense
- Flickr
- YouTube
- Facebook Pages & Groups

BASIC TOOLS THAT ENHANCE YOUR OPERATIONS & REVENUE

1. Google Analytics: google.com/analytics

Google analytics is a free reporting package that can be added onto any web site or page through adding a tiny bit of code. Even if you use Hitwise or another package, you should give GA a spin; it's got many great data tools to work with and is easy to install and use. And the insights you get should influence how you are running your web business—that's why it's Google Analytics, not Google Statistics, as Nicholas Lierman, said.

Critical data points: GA allows you to monitor include overall site traffic, traffic sources, most viewed content, popular keywords for content, bounce rate (how many pages viewed before person left your site), entry and exit pages (where users have come in and left) % returning and new users and their source (how did they get to you?)

You can view and manipulate this data on a web dashboard, export into Excel and other formats and send as email. And there is lots of data on the Web about using this tool and getting the most out of it.



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Why use it:

- Free, sophisticated analytics tool to improve revenue optimization, SEO and content conversion
- Can be used to track conversion on subscription offers

Resources:

- Google analytics blog: <http://analytics.blogspot.com>
- Conversion University: <http://google.com/support/conversionuniversity/>
- Video: Google Analytics - Bounce Rate: The Simply Powerful Metric: <http://youtube.com/watch?v=ppgfjo6llf4>

2. Google AdSense: google.com/adsense

Google AdSense is the longstanding program that matches ads to your site's content and audience, pays for user clicks or impressions. The nice thing about AdSense is that you can pick u extra cash with a tool most users are accustomed to; the not nice thing is that, typically, you won't pick up too much cash. Daily newspaper publishers with paid circ can also use AdSense for Print, which sells print ads for you.

A benefit of using Adsense is that it now integrates with Google analytics, so you can track ROI and associate data and revenue. However, papers that try Adsense may want to consider moving into paid ad networks as well and may find a higher overall rate of return there.

Why use it:

- Free, revenue generating tool
- Can maximize opportunity to gain revenue from white space or unsold inventory on page—but requires effort & traffic to work well.

Resources:

- Google Adsense Success stories: http://google.com/adsense/static/en_US/Success.html
- The Unofficial Adsense Blog: <http://memwg.com>



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- Google AdSense: Steps to success, <http://youtube.com/watch?v=WpPX4A78jqg>

MARKETING, OUTREACH & AWARENESS TOOLS

3. Flickr: <http://flickr.com>

Flickr.com, owned by Yahoo! since 2005, is the world's leading photo community, marrying social network features like commenting with individual accounts, rights management and many types of groups and communities. When news happens, flickr is one of the places to immediately go for eyewitness accounts, often hours ahead of local media (viz Oscar Grant shooting (see <http://www.flickr.com/search/?ss=2&ct=6&w=all&q=%22oscar+grant%22+&m=tags>))

For community newspapers, flickr can function as a marketing and brand development tool—it handles both video and photos. It is possible to set up groups for users to contribute photos—on an ongoing basis, or for a news or sales event (fires, Christmas lights/shopping photos), as well as to highlight output from the web site & paper as an audience acquisition tool. Rights can be reserved for assets.

PhotoGallery (see Oregonian, <http://flickr.com/photos/theoregonian>)

Why use it:

- Great resource for viral search and regional discovery
- Build engagement & community
- Speak to younger/hipper viewers & readers

Resources:

- Using flickr tools: <http://flickr.com/help/tools>
- Photojournalists on flickr: Pros & Cons: <http://journalism.co.uk/5/articles/533155.php>
- Turbocharge your traffic with flickr groups: <http://marketingpilgrim.com/2008/05/turbo-charge-your-traffic-with-flickr-groups.htm>



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4. YouTube: youtube.com

YouTube, like flickr, is a terrific place to put footage and document events, with links back to your brand/paper. Newspapers with YouTube pages range from Hawaii's Honolulu Advertiser to Illinois' Chicago Tribune to the Washington Post, and include papers in 41 states. The Statesman Journal in Salem Oregon is posting news video and getting good views, even better, they are engaging their audience. (See their Obama Mama view, which has had 1,800 views and 10 comments, mostly from local folk). Key point here is that this is recycled media—little effort, cumulative ripple effect.

At The Dallas Morning News and The St. Petersburg Times, staff made views specifically for YouTube to market and brand the papers as relevant to younger audiences. One of the videos was viewed 200,000 times.

Revenue note: There is an affiliate program, which will sell ads on your videos, but it's not particularly lucrative for most newspapers. The Knoxville News Sentinel has been a partner since 2006, but cash isn't the rate of return, says Jack Lail—branding is.

Why use it:

- Where the under 40s are; amazingly viral
- Little effort to do or maintain, once you pass the learning curve
- Adds engagement and community

Resources:

- US Newspapers using YouTube: <http://10000words.net/newspapers-on-youtube.html>
- OJR story on Dallas & Tampa Bay use of YouTube: <http://ojr.org/ojr/stories/080124yung/>
- NAA: To YouTube or Not to YouTube? <http://naa.org/Resources/Articles/Digital-Media-Online-Video-YouTube/Digital-Media-Online-Video-YouTube.aspx>

5. Facebook Pages, Groups& Events: facebook.com



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Facebook is known for its social network features—the ones that lead to your high school friends finding you again after 15 years—but it's a tremendous marketing tool to build brand awareness. If you haven't checked out the Groups and Fan Pages, do so ASAP—they are resources newspapers should be using to build engagement and affinity and market themselves in a more viral way. (The New York Times page, for example, has more than 10,000 fans; Poynter; The Chicago Tribune, The Economist, Los Angeles Times, The Onion, and NPR also have pages.)

Facebook is also a place to engage passionate community members; groups like Reinvent Newspapers(713 members) (<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=52945296344>) flourish—and are free to set up. Is there a cause your paper supports that merits a group or a page?

Why use it:

- Viral, free, reaches younger audiences
- Drives engagement & brand awareness
- Free marketing and acquisition tool

Resources

- Creating Facebook Groups: http://ehow.com/how_2031200_facebook-groups.html
- Editors' Weblog: How newspapers use Facebook to gain young readers, http://editorsweblog.org/multimedia/2008/03/using_facebook_to_gain_young_readers.php

Susan Mernit was the founding editor of New Jersey Online (nj.com) and spent the past year working as the Program Manager for the Knight News Challenge (newschallenge.org). She is keynote Program Chair for the 2009 ONA conference and passionate about helping online news entities create new revenue opportunities, maximize brand and engagement and learn how to use social media.

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