Case Study: Born-Digital Community and Hyperlocal News

Background

The mission of the National Digital Stewardship Alliance is to establish, maintain, and advance the capacity to preserve our nation's digital resources for the benefit of present and future generations. The NDSA's Content Working Group is focusing on investigating guidelines for the selection of significant content, discovery of at-risk digital content or collections, and engaging all stakeholders in the process of acquiring, preserving, and providing access to the content Working group members are developing case studies and/or models to share broadly with all stakeholders, from content producers to cultural heritage organizations. The goal of this case study is to engage all members of the community in the preservation of content and to encourage the cultivation of relationships that could enable preservation. This case study addresses at-risk news content.

About Community and Hyperlocal News

Community news is locally oriented, professionally published news content designed to serve local communities[i]. Once published as weekly or monthly newspapers or magazines, more and more of this content is now only produced electronically, in blogs or other online publications. The Pew Research Center's Project for the Excellence in Journalism published in its "State of the News Media 2012" a special report providing an update on "How Community News is Faring," which discusses some of the issues facing the creators of the content (however, the report notably doesn't touch on preservation at all)[ii] . The report states "the emerging world of community online news, less than a decade old, can be difficult to assess."

Hyperlocal news "connotes information oriented around a well defined community with its primary focus directed toward the concerns of its residents."[iii] The two terms "hyperlocal" and "community" are often used synonymously.

Historical Value

The reporting of local and community news has increasingly become the domain of "hyperlocal" news operations. Focused primarily on geo-specific news (neighborhoods or communities) or specialized reporting on local business, government, arts, real estate, etc., community and hyperlocal news fills an important gap in mainstream reporting as traditional news outlets continue to shrink. The vast majority of content is born-digital. Though the formats and models are more complex than mainstream media, the value of the content is evident when comparing

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it to its 20th century print counterparts (community newspapers; birth, marriage, and death announcements; society pages; advertisements, and opinion pages).

Recognized Opportunities

As opposed to Citizen Journalism, the production and distribution of community or hyperlocal news often has an organizational basis (commercial or nonprofit institutions). Many community reporting sites have evolved from, or are a component of, traditional media organizations. Other sites have emerged from startup companies, information aggregators, community organizations, or journalism schools. This presents an opportunity to reach a targeted (though diffuse) set of stakeholders to raise awareness of the need for preservation and to test collection and preservation models.

For example, a hyperlocal news website with valuable content was lost in February 2013. The website, EveryBlock, created in 2007 was originally designed to be user-generated forum for hyperlocal, data-driven journalism, and was suddenly shut down by its owner, NBCNews.com. The status of its content is unclear and may be subsequently lost. [iv]

Target Audiences

These audiences share multiple levels of local, state, national, and international interests in this content:

- Local communities: public libraries and historical societies; local newspaper publishers; genealogical societies; county and local governments; K-12 educators
- State-wide communities: Academic researchers; lay historians; university students and professors; archives
- National and International communities: Trending researchers; political scholars; economic analysts

Educate Stakeholders

The NDSA seeks to communicate the role that community or hyperlocal news plays in community history to stakeholders through multiple venues:

- Content creators: Online campaign to bring awareness to importance of preservation; targeted messages.
- Funders (e.g. John S. and James L. Knight Foundation and J-Lab – the Institute for Interactive Journalism): Promote the importance of integrating preservation strategies into funded proposals. Develop potential partnerships with organizations who are investing in the field.
- Journalism schools: Encourage library partnerships to preserve content from locally-developed community news sites.
- Academic, public, state libraries, and historical societies: Educate and partner with libraries on local digital news preservation (e.g., local organizations select content, NDSA members or regional centers collect); do workshop presentations at district library association meetings; conference calls with public library directors.

- Historical researchers, professors, and students: Researchers that used to rely on print sources will increasingly be concerned with the move to digital only news sources. Connect at historical association meetings and conferences; panel presentations at archivist society conferences; vendor booths, brochures, and flyers about digital preservation at relevant conferences.
- Standards organizations: Follow digital preservation standards and provide education to stakeholders about the standards.

Obstacles and Risk Factors

Possible risk factors and obstacles in community and hyperlocal news preservation include:

- Most newspaper preservation programs across the U.S. do not currently include born-digital community news content.
- Identification and selection of content in local communities is frequently a challenge.
- Obtaining permissions to preserve and provide researcher access can be a challenge.
- Information is often aggregated from different sources (including user-generated content and social media). Permissions to preserve content from third-party sources could be difficult to obtain.
- Community news sites are still struggling to find sustainable business models. Preservation is likely not high on priority lists.
- Turnkey technical solutions are not readily available for the majority of platforms, many of which are locally-developed or customized.
- Funding for digital preservation may not be readily available.

Actionable Items

The NDSA and identified stakeholders have an opportunity to address the concerns outlined in this case study. Some ideas that have emerged from discussions within the Content Working Group include:

- Reach out to organizations such as J-lab and Knight Foundation to discuss issues of preservation, brainstorm potential collaborations.
- Broaden campaign to bring awareness to the issues related to preservation of community and hyperlocal news via blog posts and presentations at targeted meetings.
- Develop or encourage a collaborative project to enable community organizations to get involved in identification of content in their communities.
- Educate journalists to prepare for their own "recoveries" by becoming savvier about the business of journalism and exploring opportunities to start their own media startups, making sure that their ideas are underpinned by a sustainable business model.

For more information, to provide feedback, or to get involved, contact ndsa@loc.gov (please include the subject line: Content Case Studies).

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[i] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Community_journalism
[ii] http://stateofthemedia.org/2012/mobile-devices-and-news-consumption-some-good-signs-for-journalism/how-community-news-is-faring/?src=prc-section
[iii] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hyperlocal
[iv] http://mediadecoder.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/02/07/nbc-shuts-down-hyperlocal-web-site/?smid=tw-share