

Multimedia Standards

<http://www.multimediastandards.org>

Kenney Irby: Well, I'm Kenny Irby. I'm the visual journalism group leader and diversity director currently at the Poynter Institute for Media Studies, here in St. Petersburg, Fla. I came to Poynter in 1995 from Newsday in New York to start the photojournalism program. In 1999, I became the visual journalism group leader.

Akilah Johnson: That being said, you seem to have a very wide perspective. How would you kind of define what multimedia is? And, what is multimedia?

KI: As a faculty member at Poynter, which is a school for journalists, journalism leaders, I mean we focus on multiple media in the journalistic space if you will. And, it is greatly evolving. And so, we like to think effective use of multiple sensory reporting craft to tell stories.

AJ: Now, as a faculty member at Poynter, are you actually producing multimedia projects on your own or are you just, kind of, teaching the skills and techniques to others?

KI: Little bit of both more of the latter though. We host workshops where folks come and we work with them to produce multimedia, but we're not producing it in an, you know, independent fashion.

AJ: That being said then, if you can then address what do you think is a good workflow, to some extent, that people who are producing multimedia projects need to enact in order to get a quality piece at the end.

KI: Well, I mean, I think that's the key, which is new. It's a whole new workflow that has to be addressed, you know, from an academic and a practical prospective. The assembly line of the printed product really doesn't work for multiple media in terms of effectiveness and timeliness. The workflow requires, I think, greater collaboration, advanced thinking about the story instead of just reacting but proactively pursuing the story. And so the workflow needs to begin with a clear understanding of what story you're trying to tell.

And most stories, with the exception of breaking news, spontaneous news experiences, really lend themselves to little bit more reflective planning and research about the story.

That said the next layer or level of thinking and decision- making has to be what skills expertise resides within the group in terms of reporting skills and competencies. Whether or not, there's the ability to use a digital recorder and gather audio. Whether there's competency in professional standards, fair and ethical reporting as well as audio interviewing and writing.

And then, last but not least, you know, increasingly the need for video becomes an integral component. And we haven't even begin to talk about the infrastructure of the architecture of the Web presentation, and that's the probably the newest and most demanding area.

The interface development and some of the coding that comes into this world of multiple media, it has to be well respected and well honored in the process because you can have great content that's presented in a very flawed way that's not engaging and not intuitive for a user to be able to find the information and be able to navigate through that information.

AJ: Well, that's one of the things that I was hoping we could talk about in terms of, kind of, functionality and design when it comes to producing a multimedia piece. What are some of the components that need to be considered on the front end?

KI: Well, there are some, basic foundational Web navigation strategies that need to be in place in terms of having a scrubber bar and understanding flash or either the coding that's being used to build the interface. And, it's not just a matter of understanding fonts and contrast and dimension on a page. That's what most Web sites have been lacking. They have rich content, but they don't have the creativity and ware-with-all to make that information accessible and make the technology disappear into the background, so that the user is actually more engaged in an interactive self-learning.

AJ: Now, you mention some kind of, like fundamentals or basics in terms of navigation and design that all sites can have and I know you mentioned scrubber bars. Are there any others that you can think of that are just integral to the design of a site?

KI: You have to have a solid video player. In many ways, it's a new lexicon and a new layer on the tool-belt. Typography is still very important and white space and use of density on a page is equally important on a Web site so that a user has time to breathe and think and be able to visually navigate themselves through, you know, what the hierarchies are and what the layers of information might be on a page. The entry point as a concept still carries over from the printed page to the screen.

Learning and information gathering is a participatory process now. And I think, that's where Web interface and understanding search engine optimization, those kinds of things are new concepts that have to be integrated into the decision making process on the front end.

AJ: Now that kind of segways into the use of social media, in terms, of how traditional news organizations are trying to figure out kind of how to harness and use social media and social networks and user generated content. What do you tell people that come to Poynter?

KI: That's the reality. These are things that you can either embrace and lead and contribute into development into new ways of thinking about journalism and information delivery or you get left behind.

Yes, people will still look to media organizations, or journalistic media organizations to be more specific, as sense makers as they have always played in a democratic and free society and—it's not an "or" it's an "and"— and they will be interested in making comments and contributing to the formation of that information in their own way—by posting their own stories, written stories, through blogs; by posting their own videos; by posting their own photographs. We see the impact of YouTube and flickr, you know, all across the board. People want to contribute to the discourse, and in many ways they want accredited journalistic media to ask hard questions and bring the kind of analysis that we've done.

AJ: When does it become too much? When are people using videos and animated info graphics and pictures—when are they just doing it because they can? How do you kind of draw the line?

KI: That is the question that everybody is engaging in right now: how do you not just establish standards but how do you confirm value? And that's the challenging part of this work right now is that the metric that are in place are not as precise as they were in a newspaper or traditional sense. Or in TV broadcast where you had the Nielsen's or ABC standards that would define reach and scope. And so, people are throwing a lot of spaghetti at the wall to see what will stick right now.

For me, it still comes down to content and whether or not there's a distinctive value added quality to the work that compels me to continue to click and drill down for more information.

And for that to happen, the quality of expertise and informative information has to be there in the audio and the video and the written narrative and information graphics. At every level of the content there has to be reason and justification for me to continue to drill down. The challenge with that is that it varies. There are the consumer or the users of this information, the UCR or user customer reader, whatever you want to name the people who are engaged in this content and are being sought after, they really make the determinations.

And the challenge is this: is that the audience is all over the place. You have your very literate and thoughtful level of users who are out there and know exactly what they want, and they know excellence when they see it and they can't quite define it, but it's like pornography to them and they know it when they see it. You've got people like that out there. You have the millennial generation that's out there, who really are driven by creativity, and they're fine with the fact that the traditional quality standards—the pictures may not be as sharp, and there may be some spelling errors and typos and grammar errors and punctuation. And then you've got

some youngsters who are out there, and they're all about: let's just express ourselves. And so, until we have a metric or system that evaluates what the audience is and what the expectations are and what are reasonable expectations from the audience we're going to continue to have some uncertainty and some nebulosity in terms of how our results are confirmed and affirmed. And lastly, until there's a methodology that clearly goes beyond registration as a source of funding we're going to continue to be in this whirlpool of experimentation and challenge.

You know, this proposition in a capitalist society is all for not if it doesn't make money. You can talk about resources, we can talk about resources. But, until there's a business model that allows an organization to be able to afford the human resources that are necessary to do multimedia and until the American people, until society and journalists agree on what's going to be the metric or funding bases, then we might be doing a lot of really rich work that nobody is looking at, nobody knows how to get to and nobody knows will monetize. That's pretty much anarchy.

AJ: What would be the way the ideal business structure for this new, kind of, Web 2.0 kind of journalism so to speak?

KI: It's really more towards the Web 3.0. Three point O, we're going to have a couple of things. This is not my area of expertise, and I don't think there is anybody out there that really knows it because if they did if they know it they wouldn't be telling anyone about it. They'd actually be doing it. I think that the challenge here is still going to be getting the American people to understand that high quality, vetted information will still have to be paid for. Because the misnomer was and has been that all of this information with the Internet will be free. It cannot go forward that way. So I think what's going to have to happen is something like the *Wall Street Journal* model, for example, where they still gain a large portion of their revenue by way of registration, and that means that Web sites and organizations will have to be specialized. You know, you go to the Wall Street Journal because you know if you're in the business world that's going to be the place that you get information that you can't get anywhere else.

And so, it's kind of a social Darwinism on the Web where people distinguish themselves as being the best at what they do. And then the American people and people around the world will begin to recognize that in order to get that...I know it need it, and I know it want it and I'm willing to pay some nominal fee for it. And as a result, the advertising models will come forward with that because the registration much in the way as the Neilson's on ABC auditing—the circulation bureau that confirm the number of circulation of news papers printed—advertisers will be willing to pay them for their eyeballs and time spent that their users use there. And, I think you will also see a place where non profits get more involved in underwriting journalism. Like Pro-Publica and things like that where citizens will get involved and they will be full participants defining what kinds of stories get funded and get reported.

AJ: OK. If we could kind of go back to the social Darwinism of journalism, so to speak, and kind of talk about contests and contest categories and how they are put together. It seems as though with a lot of these contests, multimedia contests, you have papers with lots of resources going against with papers with not a lot of resources and by resources I'm talking people, skills, skill sets, staff and that sort of thing. So can you talk a little bit about, kind of, the judging process that goes into the various contests.

KI: Listen, I'm on the committee for the best of photojournalism committee, and we have been innovating for eight years. And we're taking a big step as we speak to bring greater clarity and consolidation and focus into the categories. The contest competitions, they are good in the sense that they are one metric of how peers evaluate excellence. I've always (and I've been on most of the competitions and I've been fortunate and blessed from the Pulitzers to New York Press photographers, so I've done a lot of the major competitions and been honored to be a juror) and I've yet to see where citizen or users are sharing a voice and perspective on what is excellence. So take contests for what they're worth, and I wouldn't put all the credibility and trust into what wins an award that been deemed excellent by a group of peers because that's not the daily metric that's a different kind of metric. Contests, I think, are important. And as it relates to multimedia and multimedia story-telling, you will continue to see adjustments and rethinking of the categories and how the work is vetted because online you have, just for example, you have photo galleries. You have audio. You have videos. You have contest entries for web navigation effectiveness. You have contests that are looking at information graphics. So, all of those categories, most of them, have originated in the printed and traditional broadcast world that has been ported over. And so now, certainly within the best of photojournalism, you have been best interactivity. So those categories are now being redefined as we speak. We have a sub-committee that I've tasked of working with video, um, best of photojournalism video group and best of photojournalism multimedia and asking the hard questions. I don't have all the answers myself, but I'm pooling together a group of really smart people to say—and we will be bring in some citizens to say, some users, who have demonstrated who have an interest and knowledge—to help us define these categories. And I think that's what is exciting about this. This is like the Wild, Wild West. We're all trying some new stuff and we have an opportunity to establish some standards moving forward that will maintain relevance and help set standards for multimedia journalism.

AJ: OK. I think that's about it. Is there anything you want to add that I didn't touch on that you think is something that is important.

KI: The thing that we did touch on that I think cannot be overly stressed in a time of these kind of daunting, sea-changing, cataclysmic moves that are happening in the informational delivery world is the importance of not just designers but the producer and the code writers. You know, Rich Beckman and Carl Kunst and Laun Cooper and folks who when we first started out in exploring multiple media we

weren't calling it...we were just calling it digital photography. We were trying to see where digital cameras would take us. And digital cameras and computers that couldn't even talk to each other have now brought us to a place where...I mean, we couldn't imagine when we were all together on an island on Martha's Vineyard in 1989. So there's a lot of change and there's a lot of great possibility and excitement. With great change comes great responsibility. And the biggest responsibility is to understand that there are other contributors to information delivery. And the programmer, I think that role is a role that should not be under-estimated. You know the programmer who needs to understand journalistic purpose as it is being re-defined and ethical integrity as it is moving forward as one of those transcendent values in the power of content.

AJ: Well, thank you so much I appreciate it.

KI: Well, I hope it's been helpful.

AJ: It's been very helpful – very enlightening.