

# Crowdsourcing Changes News



There has been an incredible paradigm shift in the traditional newsroom that dramatically transformed the way media companies run the business, writes **Marcello Dellepiane, President & CEO, MediaPower.**



The typical work day of the journalist is no exception - from monitoring TV channels, radio stations, and press releases, someone else's Facebook or Twitter feed is now part of a journalist's daily reading appetite. Faster Internet speeds, computers, smartphones, and new media have levelled the playing field for broadcasters everywhere, hence the rise of citizen journalism, and its much derided counterpart, "churnalism" or a form of news rewriting or aggregation. Depending on which side you're on, this could either be proverbial good news, or bad news to you.

This article takes a look at how reporters gather news, and how the entry of crowdsourcing technologies into the equation has helped ease the process. It also examines the potential of new media in paving the way for personal journalism.

**The value of local presence in news acquisition:** Local, first-hand news acquisition opens up our eyes to unique perspectives that are worthy of our attention and scrutiny. When news is sourced locally, the potential to uncover more information that would add value to your audiences is better. Sourcing and producing news locally also allows for the exploration of varied insights or sentiments. After all, local perspectives and great storytelling are the currencies of engaging news reports and editorials.

**Challenges in local news acquisition:** Technology has evolved in such a way that the transfer of data occurs in an instant, blurring borders and geographical limitations. It has allowed the means to share news with a few swipes or clicks in real-time, as events unfold. But even with technologies that allow for real-time coverage, broadcasters and news agencies were still not immune to the challenges of local news acquisition.

It is simply physically impossible to have in-house reporters and videographers in every possible location at any time. Breaking news is difficult to capture real-time if a media outlet's own reporters are not onsite. Typically, a news outlet would send its own crew to where things are happening, but this is only practical in non-marginal situations or terribly

catastrophic events that require immediate and ongoing coverage.

Even if a news outlet decides to send its own crew to locations where they have no local crew, there is also the matter of cost and sustainability. Reducing costs is part and parcel of running today's media company, and this is not necessarily because of recessions. It's just how things are now; you have to deliver more with so much less, thanks to increased competition in the space.

As much as news outlets dream of being present everywhere to support this demand, that is simply not a possibility, at least not with their own personnel.

**Crowdsourcing through social media:** To get around some of the local news acquisition challenges, broadcasters and news agencies employ different methods. For one, they are more selective of situations where they absolutely have to send their own crew to where they have none present. Some situations are simply worth the cost, of course. When it is not, they tap partnerships with other news outlets or they hire or build a trusted network of stringers. They also purchase video footage from videographers who are at the right place at the right time.

However, even these methods could in some situations be costly and impractical. How else could they possibly source news from a local perspective? Crowdsourcing technologies may provide the answer.

Crowdsourcing is nothing new, but technology has enabled it to grow by leaps and bounds. Through crowdsourcing, information can be gathered from people all over with more ease. In fact, crowdsourcing through social media is already a viable business model for some industries. It is also already helping shape the future of journalism and media. Social networks, video sharing platforms, blogs, and similar applications have already become very big sources of information and are now a regular part of the news gathering and distribution process.

They have become sources of local real-time information. They allow news outlets to get a local "pulse" of certain events - from differing views to varying sentiments. They have absolutely affected audience engagement.

Social media has become so big and polarising such that news agencies have to "bend or bust" or embrace it one way or the other to grow their own audience or worse, sustain their own existence.

**Personal journalists:** On the other side of the coin (i.e. those who contribute their views, news, and perspectives), social networking and video sharing platforms have enabled everyone to be a potential journalist. Social networking and blogging enable the sharing of individual views or perspectives. Video blogging has enabled otherwise ordinary enthusiasts to produce some of the best video stories that can even compete with professionally produced material. Ordinary people became bloggers and bloggers became journalists - some simply by accident, and some out of a genuine interest to become a journalist.

Most people are equipped with mobile phones, often with high-resolution cameras that can capture images, record or stream videos with resolutions beyond current TV news broadcast requirements. Again, technology has allowed these people to become journalists and breaking news reporters in their own right - something that news agencies can also tap as material sources that are more readily usable.

Without the likes of Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube, coverage of

recent attacks would certainly not be covered as extensively.

**Unlimited potential for the newsroom:** Technology has brought about so much for the newsgathering process. Crowdsourcing platforms like social networks and media sharing sites, in whatever extent, is now a regular part of the newsroom workflow. While technology has made all these possible, it does not negate the need for responsible journalism and news outlets still have to enforce a vetting process to ensure reliability in their news and quality in their work.

Nonetheless, the possibilities are endless - from being able to sift through a huge amount of information, images, and video footage, to monitoring trends and interest lists, to getting first dibs on breaking news, vetting stories and verifying materials, and ensuring it is reported in the most engaging or dynamic way possible. The same can be said for being able to identify good and reliable "personal" journalists over long term, or to using social networks as research platforms for investigative journalism.

There is no doubt that technology will continue to evolve the newsgathering and production process. But even with the current applications and platforms available now, there is tremendous potential to enable newsrooms to improve the way they obtain news from local sources and present these to their audiences.

Broadcasters and news agencies should tap into this potential and streamline their workflows to make it work for them - to gather quality news from local perspectives, to add multiple dimensions in the way they present stories, all while ensuring they

produce compelling and relatable news that engage their respective audiences. It could help them gather news at lower costs, and could offer better sustainability in the long term. Likewise, media solutions providers should look into helping media outlets further improve their capabilities in their news gathering and filtering process, either with the slew of currently available technologies or developing new ones based on crowdsourcing concepts. ■



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### First-hand Experience

News acquisition through local sources leads to unique perspectives. It also allows for varied insights and sentiments that could make news reports more engaging.

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