

Section III. Expanding Community Media Center Capacity to Advance Media Justice

Videoblogging as Citizen Media: From Public Access to a Participatory Web

by *Brittany Shoot & Ivettza Sanchez*



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IN THE LATE 1980s, after Ronald Reagan's reelection, and as general distrust of the mainstream media's echo chamber grew, recognition of and acceptance for independent media began to spread. In the past decade, since the successful Seattle World Trade Organization protests of 1999, citizen journalism has gained prominence and legitimacy in the eyes

of social activists and even a growing acceptance in conventional media outlets. Activists, marginalized community members, and disenfranchised media makers tired of being

misrepresented in mainstream media decided to fight back by creating their own media – by the people, for the people.

The closed nature of mainstream media has given rise to citizen journalism, wherein everyday citizens take part in collecting and analyzing news data; and now, more than ever, with a participatory internet, citizens are also increasingly news disseminators. Many online citizen journalists – bloggers and videobloggers – come out of similar traditions that bred community media centers. When citizens and community members can produce their own media, tell their own stories, and amplify their voices through distribution channels, change begins from the ground up.

Three years ago, in the midst of a burgeoning technology movement and pushed by community access produc-

ers who still weren't satisfied with their broadcast range, videoblogging was born. Internet bandwidth was limited, compressed videos were pixilated, and downloads could take hours. Only by trial and error, toying with video compression settings, and borrowing web space, videoblogging began to emerge. For many, video on the web was a natural

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extension of community media, and particularly, public access television.

Ryanne Hodson, one of the first dozen videobloggers to publish content on the internet and seriously engage

with others through the medium, explained in her December 2004 videoblog post, *V-Blog Conversation*, “I feel like it's an amazing medium for people like myself who wouldn't make short videos just on a whim.” With a background in public television and video editing, online video and advocating for the disenfranchised was a natural step forward for a woman like Hodson. Luckily, she wasn't alone.

With many videobloggers coming from public access television backgrounds, activism, or the artistic world, the idea of spreading their own media online resonated with their existing passions. Hodson (along with other zealous citizen journalists-turned-videoblogging-evangelists such as Steve Garfield and Andy Carvin) is responsible for laying some of the initial groundwork in Boston, and has had a continued influence over aspiring and

seasoned videobloggers alike. Hodson collaborated with Texas vlogger Michael Verdi in 2006 to write *THE SECRETS OF VIDEOBLOGGING*. The professional duo also maintains resources like *FreeVlog.org*, an online tutorial covering the basics of videoblogging. Additionally, Hodson and partner Jay Dedman, both with backgrounds in local television, helped co-found *NODE101* (node101.org), an educational, free-form collaboration of teachers and media makers, promoting media literacy and providing resources for videoblogging and other personal media. As part of their contribution to a growing network of online video producers worldwide, organizers like Hodson and Dedman remain committed to teaching and facilitating new projects in their virtual community and beyond.

Around the same time *NODE101* and *FreeVlog.org* were established, many access stations across the country started incorporating videoblogging into their training curriculum. From New York to San Francisco, from Cambridge, MA, to Iowa City, IA, public access stations and community media centers started embracing these new tools and realizing that web 2.0 is linking people in new ways and changing the way ideas are exchanged. In many ways, using the existing models in community media centers, new curricula were developed to teach online video distribution.

Practitioners in the public access TV field realized that a more concerted effort needed to be made to ensure fair and diverse representation in these spaces. Internet access needed to be more accessible, and community media centers could work hand-in-hand with the expansion of video online. Aaron Valdez from Iowa City Public Access, described the challenges facing a station in his town. "When I started working here, our equipment was still half analog-based. None of the computers had internet access. It took about a year to phase out the analog and get to the point now where we have three new, very reliable, fully-loaded edit stations with internet access." Even after a serious overhaul, there was still the task of introducing social media applications

Videoblogging Resources

Videoblogging is easier than you think, and many people have the tools at their disposal – you just have to know where to begin. Here are some links and resources to get you started:

- **FreeVlog**
freevlog.org
Step-by-step tutorial to make a (mostly) free videoblog.
- **NODE101**
node101.org
Find a videoblog instructor, workshop, or demonstration near you.
- **OurMedia Learning Center**
www.ourmedia.org/learning-center
An online multimedia production resource.
- **Have Money Will Vlog**
havemoneywillvlog.com
Promoting online video projects that change the way we see the world.
- **Videoblogging Yahoo Group**
groups.yahoo.com/group/videoblogging
Join the conversation with videobloggers old and new.

To set up a videoblog, you really only need two web components – a blog and a place to host your video. These sites are great for publishing your own content, creating your own layout and style, and maintaining your copyright protection of choice.

Free blog resources:

- **Blogger** (blogger.com)
- **WordPress** (wordpress.com)

Free video hosting:

- **blip.tv** (blip.tv)
- **Vimeo** (vimeo.com)
- **Internet Archive** (archive.org)

From RSS to copyright and publicity, additional tools you'll need to get started:

- **Creative Commons** (creativecommons.org)
- **FeedBurner** (feedburner.com)
- **Technorati** (technorati.com)

Videoblogs come in all shapes and sizes and promote conversation, inspire action, and entertain. Here are some fun, talented, socially conscious vloggers:

- **Alive In Baghdad** (www.aliveinbaghdad.org)
- **Ebb and Flow** (ebbandflow.tv)
- **PouringDown** (pouringdown.tv)
- **RyanIsHungry** (ryanishungry.com)
- **Sustainable Route** (sustainableroute.com)

to communities that may have previously only used the internet for basic email and search purposes. Overcoming the digital divide – even on a community level – can take extensive resources.

Videobloggers, like local media advocates and grassroots activists, tend to have a developed understanding about issues of ownership and shared production rights. Video sharing sites like *YouTube* that have sprouted up in the past year and a half serve a growing contingent of people who just want their work to be noticed. But videobloggers resist sites like *YouTube* on principle. Instead of allowing a larger media conglomerate or clearinghouse

to hold some of the intellectual property rights over their work (which *YouTube's* user agreement states), videobloggers tend to use video hosting sites like *blip.tv* (blip.tv), the *Internet Archive* (archive.org), or even their own web hosting space. Videobloggers tend to be progressive and community-oriented and often work to expose issues not being covered by mainstream media.

Phoenix's public access station was shut down in early 2006 due to statewide video franchise legislation that was passed in Arizona. However, two web-based resources, *NODE101 Phoenix* (node101phoenix.org) and *Freedom of Speech Television* (accessphoenix.org), prove to be significant placeholders for free speech and community media in this sprawling desert city. Cheryl Colan, who founded the Phoenix Node because of her passion for digital storytelling, says that several social workers have come to her seeking ways to expand awareness around the issues their clients face. Despite one woman's total lack of media experience, Colan explained, "She learned videoblogging from *NODE101* because she wants to put a camera in the hands of Phoenix's homeless population and help them tell their own stories rather than accept their por-

trayal by local media."

In other rural communities, unexpected growth has challenged the way people think about local programming and expanding their audience to a global scale. Lowell, Massachusetts is home to the Lowell Telecommunications Corporation (ltc.org), an organization that supports television and internet video production. In a factory town like Lowell, home to diverse populations of Latin Americans, Cambodians, and many African descendants, LTC provides a new way for historically disenfranchised groups to share their stories, amplify their voices, and communicate more freely. Now there is a growing hotbed of activity where curated online film festivals are sprouting, something unimaginable two years ago. While local access television provided a means to reach local audiences, the potential for global exposure pushes people toward content production as never before.

Stories like those coming out of Phoenix and Lowell are becoming less unique as people learn to operate and maximize the potential of the tools for online production and distribution. By outfitting existing media centers with new media technology and instructors, along with the available online resources like *FreeVlog.org* and traveling contingencies of *NODE101*, a new media revolution is quickly spreading. In no way does videoblogging pose a threat to community media, or intend to replace existing structures; rather, online video distribution has become, for many, a supplement to this important community media resource.

While independent producers face, as always, being co-opted by big money and corporate interest, the tools still lie in the hands of citizen journalists and their supportive viewers – networks of allies, friends, and like-minded creators pushing the boundaries of conversation and convention through digital media. By empowering everyday citizens and traditionally marginalized communities to employ and raise their voices through new forms of media, we raise social consciousness and forcefully impact society. **CMR**



Cheryl Colan, from *NODE101 Phoenix*, shows a student how to videoblog

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