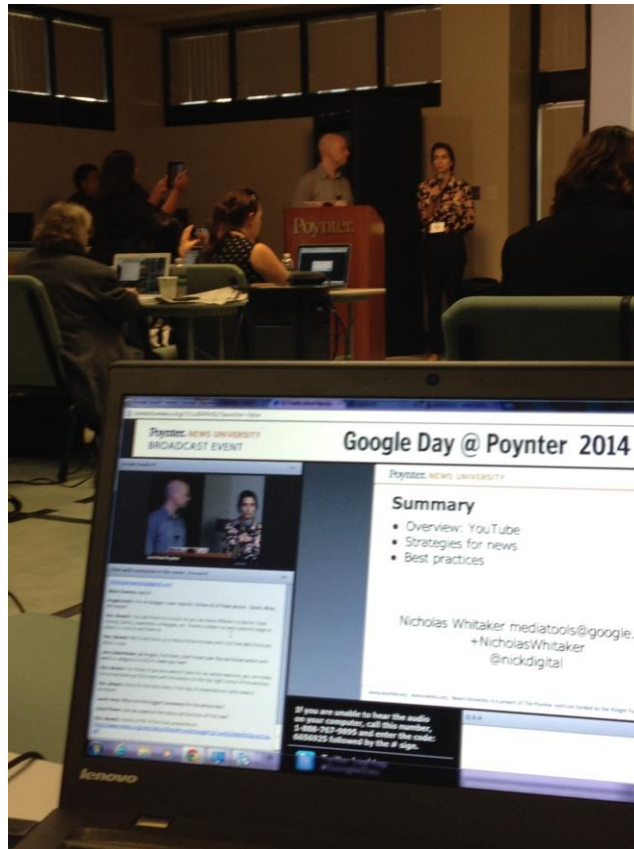


Professional development in the newsroom: how technology can be utilised to improve workplace training



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Cover image: Google Day at the Poynter Institute was run online and in-person simultaneously.

The pressures on journalists are constantly changing. From filing for online and their print or broadcast medium, to writing blogs, having a social media profile and taking photos and making videos, journalists are expected to do more. But while demands are increasing the amount of

training being offered to reporters is not keeping pace with the continually evolving environment they are reporting in. One thing is evident: everyone has the same dilemma. News organisations benefit from training, but with more demands on a limited staff finding both the time and resources to provide meaningful training is a quandary newsrooms worldwide are all struggling with.

On the surface, the simplest answer seems to be to find new ways to offer training. Digital technology and the internet give newsrooms the ability to offer training on new platforms, in more easily digestible chunks. Rather than simply offering multi-day courses that require expenses such as flying people to the same place and putting them up in hotels for two nights for intensive three day in-person courses, now leading institutions are looking to options such as interactive webinars – online lectures run via a webcam, training focused in-house websites and modules, full online courses run over a period of weeks, and mixed courses which combine new methods of online learning with traditional in-person sessions. Indeed, there are clear opportunities for these forms of learning to be adapted to a New Zealand media landscape.

Certainly this is something that Kiwi newsrooms are eager to investigate, with editorial leaders expressing a desire to introduce more means of delivering training, especially with shrinking travel budgets making in-person courses more challenging to deliver, and less frequent. Some have even started dabbling in online training. However, with any new format there are challenges, and these have been experienced in New Zealand. Indeed a key dilemma here and overseas is how to make sure the learning is meaningful and that staff devote their full attention to it – without being distracted by things such as emails and breaking news events.

In visits to the newsrooms at the *BBC*, *The Telegraph*, *The Independent* and *The San Francisco Chronicle* staff showed similar levels of interest in online learning – and similar questions about how to make it meaningful. Many have dabbled in online learning, with the *BBC*, looking to shift to a 50-50 split between digital and in-person training. But many also question whether staff would want to take part in online training, and whether they would actually do it properly, rather than simply click, click, clicking their way through it to get the necessary check mark on the personnel report.

That is not to say that e-learning is redundant. Rather, the answer lies in a mixed approach. The message from those at the *BBC* who are expanding their programmes, and those at The Poynter Institute who have been doing it for 10 years, is that a mixed approach is practical and effective, provided it is combined with traditional in-person training methods. Small webinar sessions for about an hour with a smaller audience covering an easily digestible topic would be achievable for newsrooms and could offer an easy way to inject more short training sessions into daily newsroom life. However, it has to be fully supported by managers with staff given both the time and incentive to complete the learning and attend sessions. Further, a mixed approach where online sessions and web-based modules can be used to make better use of in-person courses is both practical and worthwhile. Both the BBC Academy and Poynter are shifting to models where theoretical work is done online before arriving at the course, so the face-to-face portion can be spent better discussing and working with the techniques being taught, allowing for shorter but more focused training.

This mixed approach is what newsrooms should aim for, but it needs to be done carefully and resources put into running training properly. By starting small newsrooms have the ability to develop online learning techniques into more sophisticated programmes. Certainly media organisations have the technology to do that already – we use it to report news and hold debates online. But it is also important to realise that this sort of learning is not a matter of sticking a camera in front of someone lecturing. Any online session needs to be engaging for people to watch, or they will tune out and check their emails instead. To use these training methods, careful thought and planning needs to be given to content, medium and execution to ensure that real learning does occur.

EXISTING RESEARCH

The need to improve training in newsrooms is not isolated to New Zealand. Research into newsroom culture has highlighted training as one of the main areas where journalists are seeking change, and one of the key areas where the level of professionalism in newsrooms can be raised. Existing research into the issue of journalism training highlights it as a key area that newsroom managers need to prioritise. While the majority of reports into training of journalists focuses on

the initial training of interns at tertiary level, those that do look at ongoing development state clearly that it is a key requirement for newsrooms to ensure adequate professional development. Further to that, the journalists themselves demand it – and don't feel like they get enough. Increasingly international findings are pointing to online methods of training as something that is not only a practical means of offering training in challenging environments, but also something that journalists themselves are open too.

It would be hard to argue that training is unnecessary in the modern newsroom. Reports from around the world looking at the state of journalism and newsrooms continually highlight training as a key area requiring investment. The Knight Foundation runs training programmes and also carries out regular research of its students. It surveyed 660 alumni of its journalism programmes for its report *Digital Training Comes of Age*. The findings clearly identify the importance of training – particularly as media changes rapidly with the emergence of new technologies challenging traditional reporting norms. “Professional development has impact. Training helps journalists adopt new digital tools, create change in their organisations, or find new ways to be part of the news ecosystem,” the report stated. The foundation also reported that journalists who received training used what they'd learned making it not only worthy, but worthwhile for newsrooms. Indeed, 96 per cent of those surveyed by the foundation says they used training they received through The Knight Foundation's programmes to some degree, while 75 per cent says it was to a great or very great extent. The need for training is similarly highlighted by Glenda Daniels in her report *State of the Newsroom South Africa 2013*. She found a need for training, however there was under-resourcing to provide it with too much pressure on senior staff to deliver it. “Three major issues emerged: newsrooms were under resourced in terms of senior staff, who were already overworked; there was a need for formal mentorships; and training appeared to be in line with the newsroom in transition,” Daniels wrote. Certainly the issue of transitioning newsrooms is one that increases the need for ongoing training throughout careers. In an online report by the Centre for International Media Assistance, *Professional Development and Journalism Education*, the point is made that many training institutes at universities do not have the resources to cover all the digital developments taking place. Therefore, while the training programmes will give a grounding in the basics of reporting it puts another level of importance on mid-career training to ensure journalists are keeping pace with changing demands. “The reasoning is straightforward: better-trained journalists offer a direct path to transforming

the overall media landscape. When professional expectations are raised, media professionals are more likely to strive to achieve better results. Quality reporting, editing, and design can boost circulation and help develop a marketplace better able to support independent media. Specialised training in investigative reporting can sharpen the media's role as public watchdog, helping developing nations battle stubborn problems of crime and corruption," the centre's report stated. That message is further echoed by The Knight Foundation: "Professional development will play a key role in the transformation of the news landscape. Not all news organisations will survive the transition to the digital age. The ones that make it will be nimble, adaptable. They'll have learning cultures, where training is built into the daily routine."

While there is an undeniable need for training, the question is whether journalists are receiving it. Daniels quotes media trainer Jonathan Ancer who says that, while most people valued training there was also an unwillingness by newsroom managers to have staff out of the newsroom. "Newsrooms are stretched so there is reluctance by news editors for reporters to be taken out of production to attend workshops, conferences and seminars. This is very frustrating especially when the journalist is pulled from the training at the last minute." He continued that news editors "tend not to send their best reporters for training (because they want to keep them working) and training is then seen as a punishment rather than a reward". Certainly, journalists themselves would be among the first to advocate for further training, and they're willing to look beyond traditional methods to get that training delivered. The Knight Foundation's report found 49.9 per cent of journalists says they would experience a "very great" benefit from additional training, while just 3 per cent says there would be little or no benefit. The same report also states that most journalists feel dissatisfied with in-house training programmes, and feel there is insufficient training within their newsrooms and furthermore found that many reporters were willing to pay for training out of their own pockets and most are comfortable with online technologies. This combination of factors leads to the statement "online distance learning can be an effective, economical tool to support professional development, particularly in combination with in-classroom training". Daniels too found that reporters, regardless of level of experience, were calling out for more training. "Most journalists interviewed – senior journalists with more than 10 years' experience – were asking for training to meet new-media requirements for the newsroom in transition, especially online journalism."

This desire to learn transfers to a willingness to learn through new mediums – such as online. The Knight Foundation’s report found that journalists were open to changing methods of training: “Seven in 10 journalists who participated in online learning says it was as good as, or better than , in-person training,” the report stated. Further to that, 80 per cent of the international reporters who took online courses through the foundation reported that they found the training “as good or better than” in-person training. However, that figure dropped to a third amongst American journalists. One Argentine reporter Ana D’Onofrio described online training thus: “The opportunity to learn remotely from trainers that are working in the best places, in experience and knowledge, is something we value the most from this training, especially because it’s a skill or discipline that you can’t learn in a university, at least in our countries.” Online training opportunities are also increasing amongst training institutes, with a growing number of courses taking a mixed approach with at least some digital training, the report found. Further to that the report also points out that the growing popularity of online learning is not restricted to academia, with people independently turning to YouTube tutorials to learn new skills. “Higher education may be the next frontier for e-learning. In a 2012 survey by the Pew Research Center, technology stakeholders predicted that by 2020 opportunity, economic concerns and student and parent demands would cause university-level education to adopt new methods,” the report stated. Another report from a working group titled *Media Assistance: Challenges and Opportunities for the Professional Development of Journalists* looked at the issue of distance learning for journalists. Sharon Moshavi, director of digital media at the International Center for Journalists, told participants digital technology was the future of training. “It’s not just about training journalists to use it; it’s using it to train journalists. Distance learning is the great next frontier of training. When we incorporate Web work into the training, participants can continue to train ... It’s a great way to reach broader audiences, and places we have a harder time reaching: Zimbabwe, Iraq.” However the issue did divide educators, with one saying it “has no merit” because there was “no substitute for personal contact”. Others saw it as a combined approach. “We need to combine new media and distance learning ... Distance learning works for basic instruction. Anything beyond the basic mainstream instruction ... needs reinforcement one-on-one,” one said.

THE NEW ZEALAND EXPERIENCE

The international situation is well reflected in Kiwi newsrooms. Editorial leaders spoken to in New Zealand have all expressed a desire to implement more training, as well as emphasising the importance of training when it comes to keeping editorial staff abreast of changes in the industry. However, problems such as cost and – above all – time were consistent areas people were battling, with the need for training competing with the need for bodies on the newsroom floor. Indeed, the matter of time was equally reflected in the difficulties encountered setting up interviews with busy editorial leaders. While I ended up being able to interview Clive Lind from Fairfax Media and Gael Woods from *Radio New Zealand* I ended up resorting to written answers from Mediaworks' Mark Jennings. Approaches to TVNZ went unanswered, and while the *NZ Herald* responded willingly, when it came to getting a reply – either to an interview time or written questions – no response was forthcoming.

Training is certainly an area of importance at Fairfax. A survey of staff last year highlighted a desire for more professional development as one of the overwhelming messages from those in editorial department. However, as *The Dominion Post* editor Bernadette Courtney says, newsroom training needs to change. “I place a high priority on ensuring staff have the skills to do their job and also the development of staff so that they can progress up the ladder or have options to pursue other paths in the newsroom or wider business. However with shrinking newsrooms and a tight hold on purse strings this does place constraints on how much we can do in newsrooms ... we need to have accessible, flexible and cost effective training available to staff who now work across seven day and almost 24 hour rosters.” Fairfax editorial development manager Clive Lind also says that the most effective training is done within the newsroom itself. “You get the hands on practical stuff and people with an eye to the future.” But he also says that flexibility is essential in newsrooms, with a need to be able to adapt training to changing demands – whether it be quick workshops on writing better intros, or more in depth seminars on new techniques such as data journalism. Fairfax New Zealand journalists produce work for *Stuff.co.nz*, the country's largest media site, two national weekly papers and nine dailies, including *The Dominion Post*, newspaper of the year at the 2014 Canon Awards. Along with more than 60 community papers the print audience is about 2.4 million, while the digital audience is 1.5m a month. Lind says training is divided into three regions – north, central and

south – with the biggest focus on young reporters and making sure they are meeting company expectations. “Above all it’s about writing, good writing, what editors want, good interviewing – making sure they can deliver.” In addition the company also offers yearly courses on topics such as feature writing, investigative reporting, and middle management courses for up-and-coming leaders. These are typically multi-day courses where participants are flown to one centre from around the country. Some newsrooms also run their own training sessions for specific topics, for instance contact building, writing, or shorthand refreshers. The biggest barriers to training are cost and time, he says. The current system is costly, and in the past year at least two courses were cancelled due to budget shortfalls. The other barrier is time, with it becoming more difficult to have people out of the office, he says. “When you pull somebody out to do a course ... that’s time not spent on getting your own story, and in this 24 hour news cycle we now live in that makes it hard.” In addition not all newsroom managers recognise the value of training, making them unwilling to have staff out of the rotation for a day. Online resources have not yet been utilised for training, but Lind concedes that the company has “all the resources” to do it. However they would need to be professionally produced to make them engaging, he says, as with things like Google Hangouts the camera is always in the same place, which would not necessarily work for a lecture presentation. Those sorts of training sessions would work, but they would have to be backed from the top, he says. “Newsrooms have got to appreciate that they can’t just barge in – ‘how long are you going to be, I’ve got a story for you’ ... What we have got to do is reduce some of that newsroom pressure and see our staff as people who will actually take our company forward.” That did happen in the company’s first attempt at distance learning when, after the feature writing course was cancelled a conference call format was brought in instead. That had about 15 participants and was a success, Lind says. Fairfax was also planning to start videoing some training sessions and putting them up on the intranet for staff, with monitoring planned to see who uses the resources. While it is not reasonable to expect people to do it all in their own time, there had to be buy in from staff too, with a willingness to put their time into learning, he says.

Mediaworks faces similar challenges with training. The company’s flagship news product, *3News* at 6pm, has about 2.7m viewers a month, followed by *Campbell Live* with an average audience of 220,474 a night. The company also owns numerous radio stations, including *RadioLive*. Director of news and current affairs Mark Jennings says training is an area where the

company could do more, conceding that there “probably isn’t enough of it”. Like Fairfax, much of the focus is on younger reporters, with senior newsrooms members providing the training while also acting as mentors to young staff. “Our junior and intermediate reporters from around the country are flown to Auckland for one or two day seminars. They are coached in writing, building contacts, dealing with confidential sources, defamation and broadcasting standards, and on-camera presentation. The sessions are run by our top Producers, Presenters and Reporters.” Consultants are also employed to teach interviewing techniques to intermediate reporters and there are voice coaching sessions led by senior presenters. Most staff get training at least once a year. “It is very practical – hands on from our best practitioners.” Like other companies, freeing up staff was the biggest barrier to training, he says. “Everyone has a day job.” A particular benefit of digital learning would be the ability to tackle the time dilemma, he says. “It could be done out of work time. Staff would not need to be brought to one location.” However convincing staff to do it is the biggest hurdle he says, with most staff likely to be open to digital learning, but “some more than others” open to self-directed learning. There is also the loss of face-to-face training which staff may reject. “They like the hands on coaching they get and the opportunity to be with colleagues who are facing similar challenges etc.”

At Radio New Zealand the lack of motivation from staff was a barrier to attempts at providing online training resources. As Gael Woods pointed out when asked about Radio New Zealand’s training, the broadcaster offered access to the online resources provided by the *BBC*’s extensive online training resources, however few took that opportunity up. At the moment Radio New Zealand National has an audience of 502,000 a week. Woods explains that the state broadcaster gives all new staff an intensive week of training in aspects such as how to use equipment, voice and style. There are also regional Maori language courses, some statistics training, regular training as new technology is introduced, and social media training is being planned. All training is done in person, she says. While there is “great enthusiasm” for training, shift work makes the logistics difficult. There are no issues from above – “management here’s very keen about training” – but like other organisations money and time were consistent barriers. “That’s a lot of our people out of the system.” However, while digital techniques were used for things like board meetings, it was not seen as “user friendly” for training. In-person is better as “it’s the interaction that makes it stick with people”, she says. Self-directed training is also something the company has dabbled in but they have not found it to be overly successful. After paying for staff to access

the online resources from the *BBC* few people actually utilised the opportunity, she says, with a common response from people who were asked if they'd used it being "I think it's really good, [but] I haven't had time". Distance learning could be used in the future, particularly as it provided "economies of scale", but there will have to be ways to ensure it was useful, and that people use it, she says.

Certainly the willingness of reporters to spend their own time on training is a big question. Anecdotally editorial staff are crying out for more training – something that's backed up by Fairfax's survey. However, an attempt to get responses on the question of training through the Kiwi Journalists' Association page on Facebook, an exercise that would have required a personal time commitment, garnered no responses. Elsewhere in New Zealand, last year the Journalism Training Organisation had 29 journalists who have gained the National Diploma in Applied Journalism. This course is done through correspondence, and shows a commitment from journalists to upskill independently. The organisation has also added online resources on basics to help journalists, in a bid to broaden training opportunities.

OVERSEAS NEWSROOMS: *THE INDEPENDENT*, *THE TELEGRAPH* AND *THE SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE*

The messages from Kiwi newsrooms about training – that it is important but it is a struggle to find the time and resources to deliver it – was reflected in newsrooms visited overseas. Similarly, newsrooms overseas are facing the same difficulties. From *The Independent* and *The Telegraph* in London to *The San Francisco Chronicle* in the US, they all recognise the need to change the way training is carried out as it becomes more difficult to find the time and resources. However few are taking significant steps towards change, with a reluctance to replace face-to-face methods.

The Independent has a reputation for quality journalism. With a readership of 283,000 this London-based paper is the top level product for a company that also produces the free *Evening Standard*, which through its positioning at Tube stations has a readership of about 1.8m, and the *I* with a readership of 548,000. Deputy managing editor Will Gore says the past 18 months have

been a period of change for the company, buying and turning around *The Evening Standard*, while pushing to keep *The Independent* relevant in a market with plenty of competition. In addition this year the television station *London Live* was launched by the group, in a latest position to diversify after *The Independent* started struggling financially. “We’re still in a place where the [*Independent*] is loss making, but losses are down.” The shift and improvement has been a tough ask in a competitive market for a relatively small player, Gore says. “We have rationalised in a way that has allowed us to retain quality.” However, with the focus on rebuilding a struggling brand, the onus to provide ongoing training, while important, has been one thing that had fallen by the wayside. “It doesn’t leave an awful lot of room to maneuver in terms of some of the non-core aspects of what we want to do as a business, and actually the question of continuing professional development is something that we have thought quite a lot about over the last couple of years but we have not developed actually a proper program of it, and it tends to be a place that training happens on a pretty ad-hoc basis.” Training that has occurred in recent times has focussed on regulatory issue refresher courses and training for the launch of *London Live*. In particular, keeping up with a diversifying media brand, with more focus on different mediums aside from simply print, was a big area that needs to be addressed, he says.. “We want our guys to be able to do lots of different things, you can only reasonably expect that if you offer to help them learn.” Ideally Gore says he would like to be running seminars every couple of weeks on various topics. Online learning through webinars and modules has been discussed at the company, however there are concerns that people will find it “gimmicky”. “If it becomes seen as a negative thing then actually people are not going to take much out of it.” The key to good training is making sure the information is presented in a way that keeps people engaged, something that was easier to gauge and do in a traditional training environments. “Personally I think face-to-face is better.”

The reluctance to turn to online training methods is similarly reflected at *The Telegraph*. People development specialist Sam Morris says they lean towards face-to-face methods and are wary of sitting people in front of screens to learn. “We prefer to do it in person ... There’s a reluctance to have someone spend four hours watching a video at their desk rather than signing up for a course,” he says. *The Daily Telegraph* has a daily readership of 1.14m and Morris says there is a strong emphasis on professional development for staff, however much of it is outsourced to Journalism.co.uk with staff signing up for courses and trainers coming in to offer in-person

courses. He estimated editorial staff would have about two training opportunities a month, sourced by the dedicated department at the company. However some online training is offered, with online courses through Lynda.com available to staff with a selection of online “quite concise” videos for training. “Our philosophy is that if people want training we will make sure that we can, in some way, offer that training.” In particular there is a desire to offer training to reflect the changing pressures on journalists, so things like digital journalism and sub-editing are ongoing focuses, Morris says.

The San Francisco Chronicle will turn 150 next year. Despite its longevity it too is struggling with how to adapt to a changing media environment. With a readership of 1.8m a week across its different platforms a key area of focus is getting staff to adapt to new ways of reporting, editor Audrey Cooper says. That is particularly important after the recession when the crunch was put on newsrooms, staff levels shrunk and “we were in survival mode”. “You just have a lot of people who are just shovelling stuff [through].” However, like other newsrooms its use of online training methods is limited to experimenting with outside providers. Staff have been given access to bavc.org – a online resource that provides training videos for a variety of topics around emerging media technology. But, also like other media organisations, the uptake amongst staff “wasn’t very many people”, she says. Instead, the *Chronicle* has a new in-house program called “the incubator”. Staff are taken out of the newsroom in department groups – such as business – and shifted into a separate building where they are given intensive on-the-job training around digital news and social media. By the time they return to the newsroom they are expected to be fluent in modern news production, Cooper says. “It’s a very rigorous training programme ... they go in with their entire team and their goal is to remake themselves.” Staff are also shown how people are accessing news and engaging with their stories online. The impact is immediate – and visible in the way about half the staff were poached by other media while they were in the incubator, she says. While initially the first group, the business department, was in there for about three months, the aim is to reduce the amount of time to about six weeks.

TRAINING LEADERS: *THE BBC*

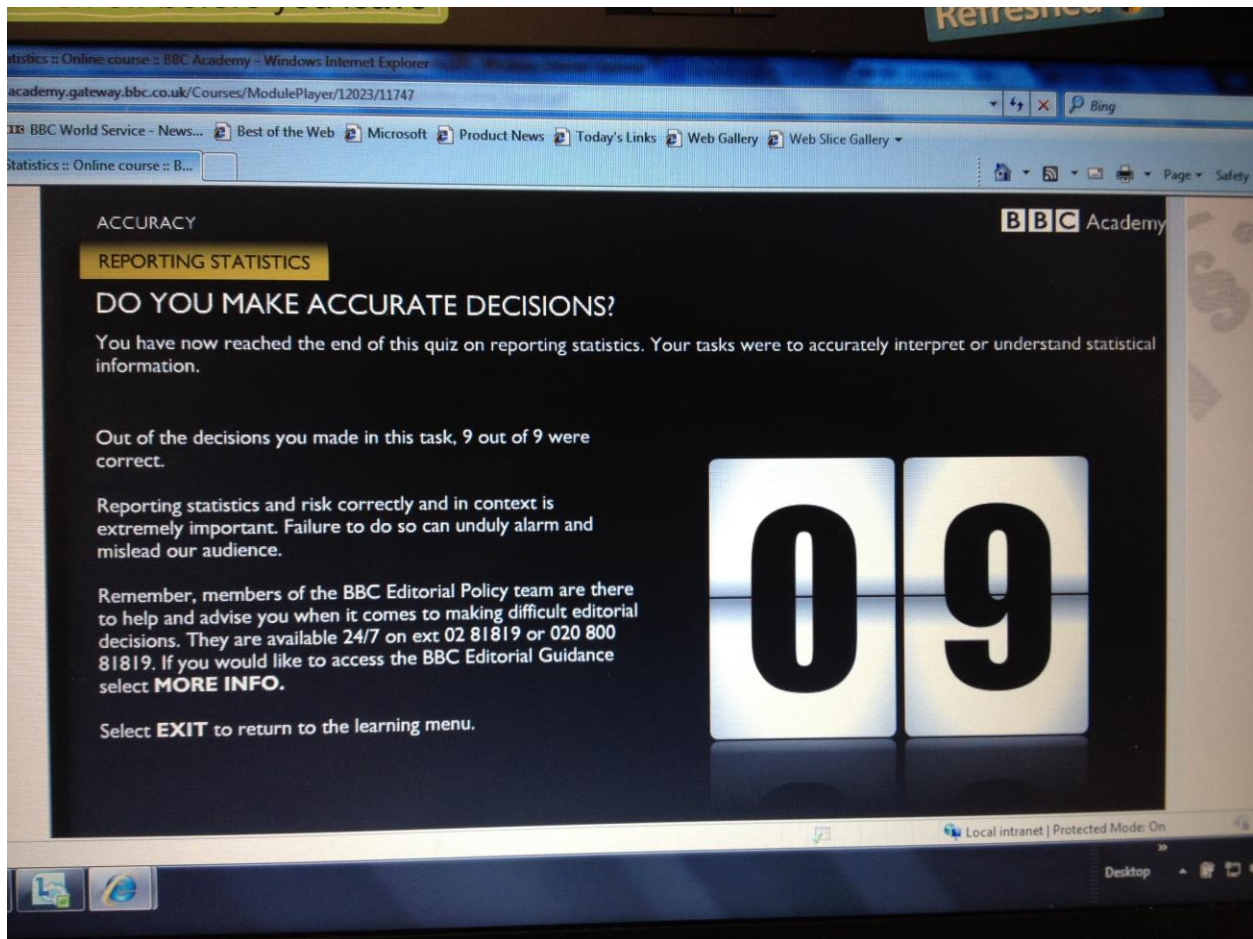
When it comes to in-house training, the *BBC* is an industry leader. With its own in-house academy the *BBC* has both excellent online and in-person training facilities, the former of which

it is required to make available to all of the UK. Certainly, with 21,000 staff around the world the *BBC* is a media machine. The newsroom has a strict code of conduct and editorial guidelines aimed at maintaining its reputation and position as a state-funded broadcaster. That same focus on quality and professionalism is reflected in the organisation's dedication to ongoing training, with the academy targeting every aspect of the company. Within that academy sits the college of journalism, which has about 50 staff providing training courses and resources to the 7500 journalists working for the *BBC*, and digital training is an area that has been marked as the way of the future. The head of the college Mark Wray says good training is about ensuring news coverage stays relevant in a changing media environment, and that means both the content of training programs and the way it is delivered has to change as well. "If it's not relevant then there's no point in having it. There are lots of things that follow from that about resources and funding and the organisation's commitment to training, but we see ourselves as the enabler of change and we are constantly changing and we like to think that without the support that we can provide that that change wouldn't happen. Part of that being relevant is, as increasingly we become a digital broadcaster a digital organisation, that more of that training has to be digital as well ... There's no point in being an analog trainer in a digital world."

That focus on digital delivery is why the organisation is looking to enhance the level of digital training. Currently about 25 per cent of training is delivered through digital means but there is a plan to increase that to 50 per cent. Cost and time are two of the key objectives, Wray says. "Real space as opposed to virtual space is expensive," he says, adding that it is also difficult having staff out of the newsroom. Part of the approach is likely to be towards increasingly mixed training modules – with courses that contained both digital and traditional face-to-face method. That would allow a lot of the theoretical work to be done digitally in advance of training courses, leaving the face-to-face portion to be more focused on practical application of the skills being taught. Further there is increasingly scope for "virtual classrooms", he says. "If people can do that without having to travel, and increasingly people do have to travel to do face-to-face training ... then that can be a benefit." However, the real-life classroom is unlikely to disappear altogether. "This is quite a big challenge and I think that those of us involved in training are keen to not shift completely into some digital delivery because there is real added value in bringing people together to share their experiences ... the people learn from each other and that's much easier to do face-to-face." Certainly there is a big job ahead convincing people that digital

learning can be just as meaningful. In part that is because most of the college's current online training is mandatory, and has the appearance of being a chore, he says.

Most of that existing training is based within the college's industry leading website. Also open to outside journalists within the UK and to overseas journalists at a price, it is used by 1.2 million people a month. It offers blogs on topics of interest and advice columns from leading *BBC* journalists. It also runs online modules that allow journalists to work through a variety of different scenarios testing everything from their knowledge of the *BBC* guidelines, to tricky ethical situations and how to use math properly in journalism. Completion of modules is recorded in the personnel files of staff. The modules generally take about 15 to 30 minutes, though some take longer depending on the topic. Courses fall into seven categories: law and standards, multi-media and multi-platform, on-air performance, online production, research and story finding, social media and connected journalism, and television and radio production. Examples include a module on accuracy when reporting statistics, which includes links to outside sources, and is in a quiz format. Another looks at dealing with criminals, witnesses and victims. It follows a fictional scenario where you are the producer of a documentary on the history and impact of ecstasy. It covers ethical questions, such as your plan to start with images of young people who died in the past four years in unrelated and not high profile cases – do you contact the families? As you make decisions it tells you whether it was the right call and provides links to the relevant editorial guidelines at the *BBC*. As the story unfolds you are confronted with different dilemmas which are highlighted with videos. Other modules look at finding and verifying contributors, media law, conflicts of interest and reporting death, suffering and distress.



A scenario journalists must work through as part of an online training module at the *BBC*.

On the surface these modules are a simple and effective way of engaging staff and getting them to think about issues of importance to the *BBC*. They are easy to navigate, can be done at your desk in work time, and if you get pulled away it will remember where you are so it can be picked up at the same spot, Completion is also recorded so there is an onus on staff to do it. But, as the website's editor Matthew Eltringham says, the model is not a perfect one. The lack of testing at the end of modules means the quality of learning is not assessed, and many staff simply click, click, click their way through without actually absorbing information. Part of the problem is people being told to do them, he says. "These modules get quite a bad name." The impact of the website is similarly limited, he says, by the amount of time staff actually spend using it. "I've always been conscious that use by *BBC* colleagues is probably very limited." The aim is now on

lifting the quality of the online content to make it more engaging. “Interesting isn’t good enough – it’s got to be practical, intelligent and useful.” They also need better ways of measuring the usefulness of the site, he says. There are between 20,000 and 25,000 page views a week, but no means of measuring how many of those are *BBC* staff. The website is another platform where there is potential to make digital and face-to-face training resources compliment each other, with people inspired to come back to the website to seek more information on a topic, he says. “You have to connect it all up.” That is an area the *BBC* has to improve on, with little if any connection between the website and existing courses. “We are not pulling in the same direction.” There is also a need to create a culture where journalists are actively seeking out learning opportunities because “they can see the value in it for themselves, you can’t make people do it”.

Certainly the integration of modes of training appears to be the future at the *BBC*. International journalism training manager Susan Fearn says with journalists spread throughout the world digital training is increasingly the easiest way to upskill staff in far-flung locales. But with some staff having limited internet access, and the practical nature of many courses, it is not feasible to completely replace face-to-face training. Indeed, a day spent sitting in on a training course for new reporters in regional foreign offices who had been flown to London for 10 days training showed the intensity of much of the training, and the importance of the face-to-face experience. On the day I attended the five participants were put through rigorous workshops in interviewing techniques and live reporting from the field. There was little theory and a lot of discussion and feedback to highlight areas for improvement and thought. As international trainer Manjushri Mitra says, it is the feedback that is the most useful part of the sessions, and that would be lost via video link. However, there is potential for pre-work such as reading to be done before courses to help make the time in person more focused and useful, she says. The question of internet connectivity was particularly pertinent for international training when it comes to online methods as the remoteness of some locations makes connections too unreliable, she says. “It can work beautifully where you have got the infrastructure in place.” Often the best way to run distance learning is as a one-on-one experience, where there could be an in depth discussion without people being lost in the shuffle of changing web cameras, she says. Fearn says the plan is to increasingly use digital training to cover more lecture heavy, theoretical aspects of training, leaving the in-person experience free for practical application of skills, discussions and feedback. “Blending models rather than going totally online.” In one course they had readings with

worksheets that people completed before attending the in-person session where they were tested on their skills and given feedback. That model is dependent on people doing the required work before arriving at the face-to-face sessions, she says. It is also reliant on the academy staff who work in the online and face-to-face areas working together. “The online and the face to face in the academy have to talk to each other.” The final area that needed addressing for digital training to be successful is incentives to make staff willing to commit to training, she says. “There has to be some sort of reward system – it has to build towards something.”

GOOGLE: ACCESSIBLE TECHNOLOGY FOR JOURNALISM TRAINING

When it comes to the digital realm, Google is the company creating much of the technology that can be utilised not only for journalism, but also for training. Indeed, from the reporting point of view, much of what Google has developed – from maps to data crunching tools – is helping change the way journalists both gather and deliver news. International media liaison Maggie Shiels says the ability of Google to assist in different means of reporting is something the company is aware of and keen to assist in. “We found people were using it but we could show them how to get more out of the tools.” Maps are a key example, she says, because they are easy to use and can “instantly make a story pop”. “They’re great for telling another part of the story. They’re great for adding another layer.” There is also now Google News Publisher Centre which enables news organisations to update its details to optimise visits to their website through Google, ensuring the all important clicks on pages. The centre’s home page explains: “If you’re a news publisher, your website has probably evolved and changed over time – just like your stories. But in the past, when you made changes to the structure of your site, we might not have discovered your new content. That meant a lost opportunity for your readers, and for you ... We are letting you make changes to our record of your news site.”

All of these tools are helping improve journalism delivery, and one of the ways Google is helping promote those tools is through regular road trips to newsrooms helping to teach journalists how the different programmes it offers can be used to greatest effect. But in addition to that face-to-face offering, it is also using its own digital platforms to deliver training on its resources to journalists. Through its Google+ social-media site it has a *Google for Media* page

which offers tips and guides on how to use the different online tools to best advantage, such as the image below, information that is constantly updated as the technology also evolves. “They’ll give you all the latest of how the tools are being used and some examples,” Shiels says. Indeed, Google also runs a YouTube channel that includes tutorials on how to use its tools and a section on how to use media tools. There is also Google for Education which offers online courses, covering topics such as how to make the most out of data, which while not targeted at journalism would apply to the profession.



Training information on the Google+ *Google for Media* page.

But as well as offering training opportunities itself, the tools offered by Google also offer platforms on which to improve in-house training for journalists. Google hangouts – whether it’s an onscreen chat, voice-call or video conference – are available to anybody with a Gmail account, which means that video conferencing, for example, which used to be something that required planning and equipment is now available to anybody with a web camera built into their

laptop. Certainly within Fairfax all staff are being rolled out with such technology and conference rooms with video capability – allowing large groups to be on camera for a hangout – meaning this means of communicating is a real part of newsroom life now. Shiels says that this technology is regularly used by Google staff themselves for meeting when people can't make it across the sprawling California campus, and it would certainly be adaptable to training. "Everybody just clicks in." However, she says, it should be used in conjunction with face-to-face meetings, rather than as a complete replacement, because having an in-person connection makes technology driven meetings much easier. "Technology is a great enabler like that. It does enable you to have that communication. There's lots of great stuff you can do too." In addition, the Google+ platform offers a means for staff to share ideas and links through social-media, similar to a Facebook group, that enables ongoing learning. That includes going through presentations, and switching between speakers. Tutorials on how to best utilise the technology are all available online.

MASSIVE OPEN ONLINE COURSES: AMY SCHMITZ WEISS, JOURNALISM PROFESSOR

While individual news outlets are investigating how digital platforms can be used to better enhance training opportunities for editorial staff other education providers are also looking to online as a way to deliver ongoing training opportunities for professionals. One such organisation is the Knight Centre which is based at the University of Texas at Austin and describes itself as "a professional training and outreach program for journalists in Latin America and the Caribbean". Since 2003 it has trained more than 6000 journalists from Latin America and the Caribbean. Topics have included investigative reporting, ethics, digital journalism techniques, election reporting, coverage of armed conflicts, computer-assisted reporting, and many others. The website explains: "Our short courses last from four to eight weeks. They are conducted completely online and taught by some of the most respected, experienced journalists and journalism trainers in the Americas. The courses take full advantage of multimedia. They feature video lectures, chats, discussion forums, audio slideshows, self-paced quizzes, and other collaborative learning technologies. Our expert instructors and cutting-edge platform provide a

quality learning experience for the journalist who seeks to improve and/or gain new knowledge or skills for the 21st century newsroom.”

For The Knight Centre one platform being utilised for journalism training is the Massive Open Online Course (MOOC). These courses are available worldwide for those who sign-up and offer a traditional tertiary style course, but through a website. The course is run through a structured system with lectures posted online for students to either watch live or at a time that suits. There are also online communities for the students to discuss topics and assignments and ask questions of teachers, helping to simulate a classroom environment. In 2013 the centre ran a five-week MOOC on data journalism, using five leading journalists for instructors: Derek Willis from *The New York Times*, *National Public Radio*'s Jeremy Bowers, Lise Olsen from the *Houston Chronicle*, Sisi Wei from *ProPublica*, and Amy Schmitz Weiss, a journalism professor from San Diego State University. The resulting course, the first run with more than one instructor, attracted more than 3700 students from 243 countries.

Schmitz Weiss ran the course and has been involved in the centre's distance learning since it started, acting as the assistant co-ordinator until 2008, and since then has remained involved as a consultant. It's important to explore new ways of teaching, she says in the online article *Teaching a Journalism MOOC: 5 Tips and Techniques*. “I don't have a crystal ball to say if MOOCs will become a permanent learning fixture, but I do think as educators we have the opportunity to explore this format to test out new forms of teaching. In the 21st century we have the chance to set the path toward new and exciting ways of teaching subjects, and the only way to do so is if we are willing to experiment with different approaches.” To run such a course, the article advised, careful thought had to be given to planning the content and instruction model, preparing a detailed syllabus, working on the project as a team, being detail driven throughout the course and being as involved as possible with students. “It takes a lot of time. Any online course, whether it is a MOOC or not, takes a lot of time to plan and maintain once it launches. Be prepared to spend twice or four times as much of your time on the course. Be available to the students. As the online medium creates an imaginary distance between people, students crave interaction with the instructor to know they are there. Try to be as present as possible in the course. Don't take on too much. Don't try to put everything into the MOOC about the given subject. I started out in the planning phase by including a lot of information and ended up

reducing it by half to make sure it would be a manageable amount of course material for the students.” Forums through social media networks – such as having a Twitter hashtag and a Facebook page – are also key to the success of MOOCs, she says. “They were not obligated to use these platforms, but many of the students did – to post resources/articles, interact with each other, and converse with the instructors. The social media channels remain open after the course has ended and serve as ongoing learning communities for the students.” Having lecturers participate in the forums helps direct the interaction and make it meaningful.

While MOOCs are a popular means of delivering content to a wide audience they have a high dropout rate, with one estimate from the Poynter Institute being that MOOCs have an 85 per cent dropout rate. Schmitz Weiss says there is no specific percentage for drop-out rates, but when people did not complete a course it usually came down to the time factor. “People are so busy nowadays that I think people sometimes just don't have the time they like to complete the course.” Success in these courses was student driven. “It's based on what the student considers success. If they feel they have come away with new knowledge and understanding and ways to apply what they have learned, then the course was successful – whether it was one week of content or four weeks of content.” For students, its about learning to pace themselves through the course.

Schmitz Weiss believes there is plenty of opportunity for newsrooms to utilise online and digital training. “I highly recommend it. It can provide your company another way to help the professional development of your staff. It gives the flexibility of where they can learn and how they learn on their own time. It should not replace face-to-face learning, but can be a nice compliment. Constant training is very important for any media professional today. In order to be the best and stay competitive, a company should put a significant amount of resources toward education and training for their staff.” However, MOOCs are not the right starting point. Given the heavy time commitment required to create and run an MOOC smaller more manageable formats – such as Google hangouts or self-directed courses – will be the better approach for news organisations, she says.

Certainly that message is reiterated in her article *5 tips on how to teach a successful MOOC in journalism based on the Knight Center's "Data-Driven Journalism"* outlining tips for running a

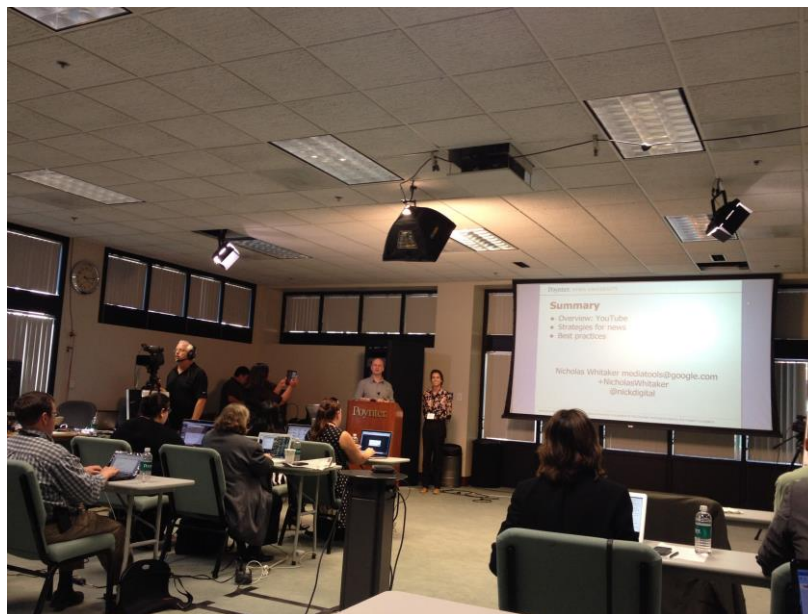
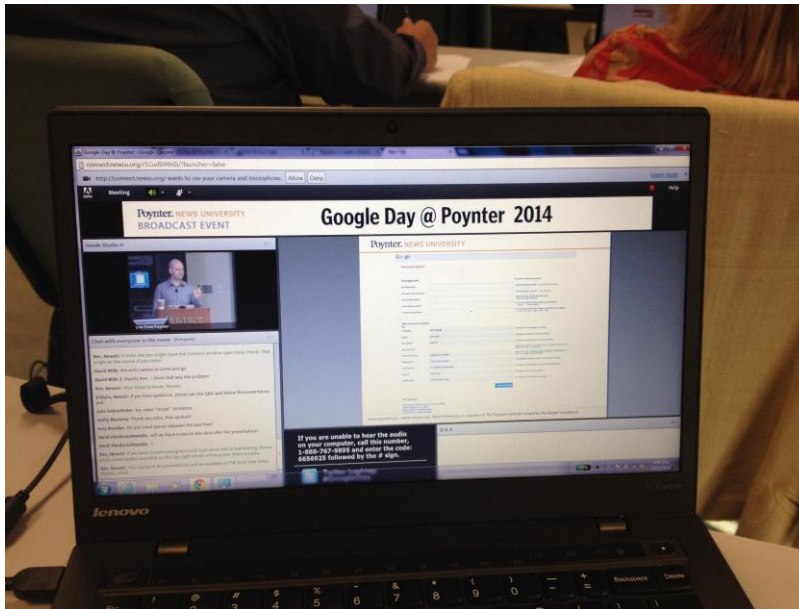
MOOC, with the sheer scale of such a course being one of the main challenges her co-teachers identified. “The most challenging aspect for me was scale,” Bowers says. “Especially for a tech-driven subject like news applications, I had a built-in assumption that I could individually shepherd along stragglers. But with 3,500 students, this isn’t really possible – you might have 200 stragglers! My immediate feeling after the MOOC was that I should have been more careful to segment the “easy,” “intermediate,” and “hard” parts of my lectures/questions and then offered more instruction around the “intermediate” and “hard” concepts.” As Schmitz Weiss concluded, the way a course such as an MOOC is run is as important as the content it is portraying, making effectual planning and time commitment essential – something busy newsrooms are unlikely to be able to commit to. “A MOOC is not just about the digital platform, the digital technologies used, the massive number of students enrolled or the subject taught. It all depends on the instructors, how they teach the subject, and the way they interact with the students in the learning process that will determine whether the MOOC or any other online course will be successful.”

THE POYNTER INSTITUTE: 10 YEARS OF ONLINE TRAINING

When it comes to on-going e-learning opportunities for journalists The Poynter Institute in St Petersburg Florida is leading the way. The journalism institute is dedicated to promoting ongoing learning opportunities for journalists and uses a range of mediums to do so, from blogs, in-person training sessions both at the institute and in newsrooms, and through webinars and online seminars. It’s website states: “we teach those who manage, edit, produce, program, report, write, blog, photograph and design, whether they belong to news organizations or work as independent entrepreneurs. We teach those who teach, as well as students in middle school, high school and college – the journalists of tomorrow. And we teach members of the public, helping them better understand how journalism is produced and how to tell for themselves whether it’s credible.” Having started in 1975, every year thousands of journalists use the school to improve their skills. In particular, e-learning has been on offer at the institute for 10 years, with Poynter one of the first to adopt the new technology as a learning platform.

Today, through its News University website it is leading the way in online offerings, with webinars and courses on every facet of journalism available online. Director of interactive learning Vicki Krueger says today more content is online than ever before. There are about 20 in-person public seminars a year and 50 to 75 private courses. That compares to about 400 online offerings every year available to 3000 registered users. “People are learning online all the time whether they realise it or not and I believe we can harness that technology to really teach effective journalism ... and we have worked hard to do that.” Whether or not online or in-person works best for a course varies on a case-by-case basis, but the two biggest resources that impact training are money and time, she says. One of the major benefits of online is being able to quickly respond to emerging media trends and topics – such as the emergence of social media and how to use it for journalism, and hot topics such as covering the Ebola epidemic. It also offers more interactive ways of teaching, such as games that help people absorb information. “They’re a better way of learning than just by reading. People learn by doing.”

One of the key challenges of e-learning is making sure it is engaging and keeps people interested. For webinars, using production techniques such as multiple cameras to change angles and keep people interested, as well as having live chat options with audiences to encourage participation this can allow people to keep engaged and forget that its online. These courses also tend to be more up-to-date and reflective of the latest media lessons, whereas self-directed courses are “more evergreen”, Krueger says, as they allow people to go at their own pace and when it is relevant to them – there are about 80 such courses and up to 10 are updated each year. Certainly the importance of production was evident at Poynter’s Google Day in October. This in-person day-long seminar featured teachers from Google leading a room full of people in practical lessons on how to use the company’s latest online tools to improve their journalism. While ostensibly an in-person course, with about 30 participants in the room, it ran simultaneously online, with about 100 online audience members feeding questions directly to the teachers via moderators. There was also a Twitter feed that people both from the seminar room and distant locations were using to discuss the information, and the chat section for online audience members became a forum for people to add additional links and information that fed the conversation and learning of everyone. Watching online while sitting in the seminar the quality of the production was evident, with multiple cameras making it a seamless presentation that made it just as worthwhile as being in the physical building.



The view online during Google Day at the Poynter Institute compared to the view in the room.

Vanessa Goodrum, interactive learning producer at Poynter, says interactivity is key to successful online learning as it keeps people engaged. “If it can be interactive it should be interactive.” For companies looking to introduce e-learning, slick productions are not a realistic starting point. The easiest platform would be a simple webinar. However, it is important not to

underestimate the amount of preparation that goes into producing a short online lecture, she says. One of the biggest challenges is finding a teacher who can teach well in an online environment as there's much less ability to go off script without losing people who will simply click out into another window. Working through the content and keeping it simple and to the point is highly important, she says. The teacher has to ensure the students stay on track, working towards a clear end goal of what the students should have learned when they leave. "What's supposed to be accomplished by the learner at the end of the course?" That message is echoed by senior faculty Al Tompkins who travels the US visiting newsrooms as well as taking online courses. Teaching online is very different to in-person teaching, because it is much easier to make connections with the students in physical classrooms, he says. "It takes a special teacher to teach online." Hence interactivity in online learning became crucial as a way to imitate the in-person component, particularly in skills training exercises. However, for more discussion driven classes involving things such as ethical debates it is much better to have face-to-face sessions as it means "I can see your eyeballs", he says. "When you get a lot of people talking online it's not the same as people talking in the same room." Indeed, like other organisations visited, at Poynter too there is a shift towards more integrated courses, Tompkins says. Where in-person courses used to take five days, now they're more likely to take three with online components bookending the in-person part to help set the scene and drill home key messages. For Krueger the key to successful online teaching is making sure the objective – what you want people to learn – is clear, sticking to that brief, and making sure there's interactivity to keep people engaged. Three things are key to successful online learning, she says: simplicity, interactivity and fun. "The voice and the tone are really important, you don't want to talk down to people. You want them to feel engaged and like they can be part of this experience. If they're going to give up their precious time you want to make it worth their while." Certainly the interactivity at Google Day proved the point, with engaging delivery combining with practical actions for people to do as they followed along making it a worthwhile experience both online and in person.

However, while the resources available online for Poynter are admirable, the Effective Reporter course also served to prove the value of in-person training. While aspects of the course could have been online – such as tips around dealing with formal requests for information through the American equivalent of the Official Information Act – other aspects, such as one-on-one mentoring, vigorous debates and talks with Pulitzer Prize winning journalists would have lost

some of their magic online the main benefit from the course being walking away with new ideas and drive along with new contacts. Much of the debate was very much driven by people reacting quickly to each other's points and talking over each other – something that would turn into white noise in an online environment. Certainly, the endearing memory of head faculty Tom Huang, editor of *The Dallas Morning News* Sunday and Enterprise, quietly reading out his moving feature to talk about feature writing, or Tompkins leading a stirring debate in real-time forcing the group to make snap editorial decisions for a heated ethical debate, are both aspects of the course that would have lost that sticking power had they not been in person. But even that course, which was very much designed for the face-to-face experience, benefitted from online resources, with a Facebook page set up ahead of time allowing people to connect even before they arrived, and stay connected in a more immediate way than would have been traditionally possible – helping bring home the point that face-to-face and online are not always disparate teaching methods.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Through this research, the lessons learned from newsrooms in London and San Francisco, The BBC, Google, a leading academic and the Poynter Institute proved that e-learning is a legitimate path for New Zealand newsrooms to embark upon to help improve the level of ongoing training to help keep journalists' skills fresh and up-to-date. Certainly there is a clear desire for more

training, not just among Kiwi journalists but also among our peers overseas. But, while online learning is definitely possible, it is also clear that it needs to be carefully considered and requires dedicated resources to ensure it is valuable for both companies and reporters. It should not replace in-person learning, as this helps provide a valuable experience for journalists. Instead it should be adopted as a way to compliment and enhance training. There needs to be careful consideration put into how training will be run, and resources committed to the task.

Key recommendations:

1. Commit resources to training. To create good training – whether online or in person – there needs to be staff committed to the task of providing training. To start developing online resources a small team that includes a trainer and a web expert should be put together to help design courses.
2. Identify training areas. Work out what you want to teach and plan curriculum carefully to avoid straying off topic. Also identify what is the best format and plan content so that it can stay on topic and keep peoples' attention.
3. Introduce webinars. These are the easiest way to start introducing online learning. They can be delivered easily to small groups using existing technology such as Google Hangouts. These can be a stepping stone to more complicated set ups with cameras and production teams as you see what works for your newsroom.
4. Start a website for staff. This can be a place where senior staff can blog about editorial issues. There can also be quizzes and other interactive resources for staff to build upon. For example: if a company does a large scale project, such as Fairfax's *School Report*, you could do video interviews with staff explaining the process that they went through to create that work, hence helping teach reporters in other parts of the country how to approach such projects. This can also be a place for discussion forums among staff so they can bounce ideas off each other.
5. Enhance in-person training. Look at existing offerings and see what can be put online. If there is a heavy practical element, consider having a webinar or readings posted online beforehand to free up more time during the face-to-face component for the practical teachings and fiery debates.

6. Give staff time. If you commit to training that means giving staff the time to do it. If there is a video from a webinar allow staff an hour to sit through it, uninterrupted. It is easy to treat a webinar as though it's not a proper training course but it has to be given the same level of importance as in-person courses, or staff won't buy into it. Similarly, if resources are posted to a website staff need to be encouraged and given time to look at and use the resources.
7. Explore overseas offerings. Sites like the BBC and Poynter offer online resources already. As well as looking to these for inspiration staff should be encouraged – and given time – to use the resources that already exist in self-driven learning.

Newsrooms are increasingly multi-media focussed which means they have staff capable of creating online resources and running webinars. At the end of the day, technology has changed and as newsrooms become more tech-savvy there is a real opportunity to create more and better training opportunities for reporters utilising those existing resources. E-learning offers a real and cost effective way to improve training, and by taking the first steps and starting small New Zealand newsrooms can build online resources that will help improve the quality of their media products.

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