

# Case Study: Citizen Journalism

## Background

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

## About Citizen Journalism

Citizen Journalism is based on the concept of public citizens playing an active role in the process of writing, collecting and distributing news and information; and is driven by different objectives than mainstream media. Social networking sites, media-sharing websites and DIY blog platforms make it easier to distribute the information. And with the increasing prevalence of cell phones equipped with cameras and video recorders, citizen journalism has become more accessible to people worldwide.

The type of information can take many forms - from tweets and Facebook posts playing an active role in Arab Spring to a local blogger posting a podcast editorial to report about a city council meeting. It can include text, pictures, audio and video. But it's basically all about communicating information of some kind.

## Historical Value

Citizen Journalism has played an increasing role in the reporting of major global events and provides on-the-street accounts of events unfolding around the world such as the Arab Spring, the Japanese Earthquake, and Occupy movements. A study in 2010 found that citizen journalism complements professional journalism<sup>1</sup>. Citizen journalism content is not disseminated through traditional publishing, so NDSA members have faced challenges in identification, selection and preservation of content, as well as technological challenges in capturing content posted via popular social media services.

## Recognized Opportunities

Social media and blogging platforms don't readily allow via technical infrastructure ways for content creators to easily download and save their own content. Terms of service on social media sites often restrict copying for preservation by libraries and archives, even if content creators are amenable to preservation. NDSA can work to reach out to content creators and publishing platform creators to raise awareness of preservation requirements, and to engage stakeholders in selection of important content for preservation.

## Target Audiences

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

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

## Educating Stakeholders

The NDSA seeks to communicate the need for preservation of citizen journalism content to stakeholders through multiple venues:

- Content creators: Online campaign to bring awareness to importance of preservation; targeted messages. Blogger conventions
- Publishing platforms: Build and promote easy-to-use plugins and tools that allow opt-in for preservation or better ways of personal archiving and instructions for delivery to preservation organizations (Wordpress, Tumblr, etc.)
- Funders: J-lab and Knight Foundation
- Journalism schools
- Local governments
- High school educators
- Public libraries and historical societies: Educate and partner with public libraries on citizen journalism preservation (local organizations select, NDSA members collect); workshop presentations at district library association meetings; conference calls with public library directors.
- Historical researchers, professors, and students: Connect at journalism and historical association meetings and conferences; panel presentations at archivist society conferences; vendor booths, brochures, and flyers about digital preservation at relevant conferences..

## Obstacles and Risk Factors

Possible risk factors and obstacles in citizen journalism preservation include:

- Identification and selection challenges -- determining what content to preserve when the content is published in non-traditional ways (and typically not by major publishers) may be a challenge
- Technological challenges in preserving social media content with current crawler and access tools
- Rights policies are unclear -- preserving organizations may need to seek explicit permission from content creators or have them opt-in to preservation
- Funding for digital preservation may not be readily available
- Standards: There are many different and varied digital preservation strategies which makes it more difficult to provide education to stakeholders
- Awareness: Different levels of understanding among citizen journalists about the importance of preservation

## Actionable Items

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

- Define the term "citizen journalism" as it relates to selection of content for preservation
- Identify potential partners to help in selection of content
- Work with blogging software vendors to allow content creators to easily opt-in to preservation
- Raise awareness about the need for preservation, with a focus on content creators and publishers (perhaps similar to Personal Digital Archiving messages)

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

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<sup>i</sup> <http://digitaljournal.com/article/292589>