BUSTY HOOKERS, POLITICAL MISFORTUNES AND UNREGISTERED LOBBYING

How former cabinet minister and Conservative M.P. Helena Guergis and her husband became fodder for sensational allegations that still have Parliament Hill reeling

by Russ Martin
Hong Kong, Asia’s world city, is a Special Administrative Region of the People’s Republic of China, run by Hong Kong people under the “One Country, Two Systems” principle. Hong Kong is one of the most open, externally oriented economies in the world. The city has been rated the world’s freest economy by the Heritage Foundation and Fraser Institute.

What makes Hong Kong tick as a great world city? … Its unrivalled location; its liberal investment regime; its low tax regime; its transparent common law legal system and rule of law; its world class infrastructure; its free flow of information; its entrepreneurial spirit; and a truly international lifestyle.

Student journalists, who are interested in gaining first-hand knowledge about Hong Kong, are invited to apply for the “Student Journalist Hong Kong Fellowship” jointly organized by the Canadian Association of Journalists (CAJ), and the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office in Canada.

Two student journalists will be selected by CAJ each year. Each will be awarded a package including a five-day visit program with an economy class air ticket and hotel accommodation. In Hong Kong, the winners will have the opportunity to visit various points of interest, and meet with people of diverse views and backgrounds. The selected student journalists must publish or broadcast at least three stories about Hong Kong within six months upon completion of the trip in the local media or in their university/school publications. They will enjoy complete editorial freedom.

The award is open to any journalism student who is currently in a recognized university or college level journalism program. Applicants must be a paid-in-full member in good standing of the CAJ. Non-members may take up membership upon making an application. For application procedures, please visit the CAJ website at www.caj.ca.

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The Canadian Association of Journalists
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by Thursday, July 30, 2010

For enquiries, please contact:
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Stephen Siu, Assistant Director (Public Relations)
Hong Kong Economic & Trade Office, at (416)924-5544 or email: stephen_siu@hketcotoronto.gov.hk
MEDIA

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COVER PHOTO
Former cabinet minister and Conservative M.P. Helena Guergis and her husband, former Conservative MP Rahim Jaffer, became the focus of a media scandal, dominating political coverage for months. THE CANADIAN PRESS/Sean Kilpatrick

MEDIA is published four time a year by the Canadian Association of Journalists. It is managed and edited independently of the CAJ and its content do not necessarily reflect the views of the association.

FIRST WORD

Where are we heading?

This edition of Media magazine contains a little of the old and a lot of the new. First the old, as in the kind of journalism that requires the digging and the shoe leather we’ve come to associate with investigative enterprises.

In the cover story, Russ Martin takes us behind the scenes of what is arguably one of the most sensational stories to come out of Parliament Hill in years. The characters could be right out of a Hollywood movie: Helena Guergis, the glamorous ex-cabinet minister with a reputation for being a diva whose downfall began with an inexplicable meltdown at the Charlottetown airport and ended with allegations involving unsavory characters cutting backroom deals; her husband, Rahim Jaffer, the disgraced former Conservative MP who seemed to have it all – looks, smarts and the confidence of his fellow M.P.s. Together they were the power couple that jazzed up a dour Conservative brand. Rounding out the cast were suspicious businessmen, a debt-ridden private eye with possible secrets to tell, a prime minister looking to get rid of the unsavory mess, and, of course, those “busty hookers.” Yes, this story had it all. And journalists on Parliament Hill, and outside Ottawa, had fun digging into the allegations that so far still remain murky. The sensational allegations and tawdry subject matter notwithstanding, the Guergis-Jaffer affair also represented examples of supreme sleuthing as exemplified by the Toronto Star and Collingwood Enterprise Bulletin, the local newspaper in Guergis’ riding.

Sleuthing was also at the heart of the Airbus affair with its allegations of kick-backs and suspicious payments to former prime minister Brian Mulroney. For the past 15 years, CBC investigative journalist Harvey Cashore attempted to answer one simple question: What happened to the 25-million dollars in commissions that resulted from the sale of the Airbus jets to Air Canada? Cashore documents his quest for that answer in his highly readable new book The Truth Shows Up. There can be no finer example of shoe-leather journalism than his dogged pursuit of the main characters, including the shady middle man, and a former prime minister who was determined to spin his own version of the truth. Reading the book, I was astounded at Cashore’s (full disclosure, Harvey is also a colleague at the CBC) tenacity and refusal to accept pat and half-backed explanations, and his fearlessness in the face of lawsuits that could have destroyed his career. For anyone passionate about investigative journalism or curious about the Airbus affair, I would recommend you add this book to your summer reading.

As part of a transition towards the new – as in a new generation of journalists – there is the story of a negligent landlord in Ottawa that allowed tenants to live in deplorable conditions. Digging through building inspections data, Laura Osman and Stuart Thomson (full disclosure again, two of my former students), identified the landlord, TransGlobe Properties in Ottawa that allowed tenants to live in deplorable conditions. Digging through building inspections data, Laura Osman and Stuart Thomson (full disclosure again, two of my former students), identified the landlord, TransGlobe Properties in Ottawa that allowed tenants to live in deplorable conditions. Digging through building inspections data, Laura Osman and Stuart Thomson (full disclosure again, two of my former students), identified the landlord, TransGlobe Properties in Ottawa that allowed tenants to live in deplorable conditions. Digging through building inspections data, Laura Osman and Stuart Thomson (full disclosure again, two of my former students), identified the landlord, TransGlobe Properties in Ottawa that allowed tenants to live in deplorable conditions. Digging through building inspections data, Laura Osman and Stuart Thomson (full disclosure again, two of my former students), identified the landlord, TransGlobe Properties in Ottawa that allowed tenants to live in deplorable conditions. Digging through building inspections data, Laura Osman and Stuart Thomson (full disclosure again, two of my former students), identified the landlord, TransGlobe Properties in Ottawa that allowed tenants to live in deplorable conditions. Digging through building inspections data, Laura Osman and Stuart Thomson (full disclosure again, two of my former students), identified the landlord, TransGlobe Properties in Ottawa that allowed tenants to live in deplorable conditions.

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Former cabinet minister and Conservative M.P. Helena Guergis and her husband, former Conservative MP Rahim Jaffer, became the focus of a media scandal, dominating political coverage for months. THE CANADIAN PRESS/Sean Kilpatrick

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Make a plan before you write: Part 11

In the end, your task is simple. Tell stories. Tell them well.

Tell them when you have a change in location, a change of speakers, a change in time. Keep the reader informed with every move.

Tell the people what you are reading. Are you as excited as your reader?

Tell your reader what you think. Do they agree or disagree with you?

Tell your reader how you arrived at your conclusion. Did you have any doubts along the way?

Tell your reader what you learned. What did you learn from your research?

Tell your reader what you have accomplished. Have you completed your assignment?

Tell your reader what you would like to say next. What is your next step?

Tell your reader what you are planning to do. What are your next steps?

Tell your reader what you are feeling. Are you feeling worried, excited, or just plain tired?

Tell your reader what you are thinking. Are you thinking about the future or the past?

Tell your reader what you are doing. Are you doing anything else besides writing?

Tell your reader what you are feeling. Are you feeling positive, negative, or just neutral?

Tell your reader what you are planning to do. What are your next steps?

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this weekend, a massive fire threat- ened to engulf an entire city. Then the heavy smell of charcoal hits you. Turning a corner you see the fire raging on the mountain, a black tongue licking down the hillside, consuming everything in its path. Marching off to the summit, stuck like spears into the soil, are thou- sands of dead, black trees.

ENDINGS

Just as important as beginnings. In fact, Justice Denise Bellamy, of the Ontario Su- preme Court, says she was taught in "judgment writing school" that the opening para- graph is prime real estate. "Why would you put a hot dog stand there?"

Why, indeed? And while you’re at it, think of your ending before you get there. Endings shouldn’t leave readers hanging over the edge of a cliff, unless you’re run- ning a series and want to entice them back for more tomorrow or next week.

Here’s a writer who has a catchy lead and an excellent ending as he circles back to the beginning to complete his story in a natural and charming way:

Opening: Susan Wright’s life of crime began about two weeks ago, on a sunny Sunday afternoon. She stood at the corner of Bathurst Street, just south of Dupont Street. The coast was clear. Ms. Wright went ahead with her plan. A minute later, as she headed west on Olive Avenue, a police car pulled up next to her. Ms. Wright had joined the ranks of Toronto’s fastest-grow- ing criminal class—the jaywalkers. “I couldn’t believe it,” said Ms. Wright, who lives downtown and owns a business called Tree Hugger Puppets. “Who gets busted for jay- walking?”

Ending

This week, Ms. Wright went to the courthouse to fight her ticket, arguing that the fine was excessive. The jus- tice of the peace agreed, and dropped it to $20 from $50. Ms. Wright de- scribed the trip from her home to the court: “I jaywalked seven times to get there,” she said. “I just didn’t get caught.”

In the end, your task is simple. Tell sto- ries. Tell them well.

William Blundell (The Art and Craft of Feature Writing) says nothing is easier than to stop reading. “We fail to heed the unspoken commandment that undergirds all oth- ers, the only common demand of readers everywhere: For Pete’s sake, make it inter- esting. Tell me a story.” That’s the real challenge every day. Do not approach any story with complacency and for heaven’s sake, accept the challenge every story has to offer; no matter how mundane it seems at the time. Bad attitude kills more good stories. Instead of being negative going in, look for the gem in every story. It is there. (Thus endeth the preachy part.)

No doubt you can add more to this checklist of basics, but the list should serve as a reminder to constantly stay on top of the tools that make for excellence in writ- ing. Just as airline pilots make the same checks over and over again on every flight, writers need to do the same on every story. It will keep you sharp, help you avoid or overcome lazy habits, and exercise your mind.

While you’re at it, take some risks. Bet- ter writing comes from leaving the com- fort of the safe or routine approach. It also means accepting, if necessary, failure. We learn from our mistakes and we are better for it. — Don高铁，who taught reporting for 20 years at Ryerson University’s School of Journalism, re- tired in 2008. He can be reached at digit81@ cogeco.ca

Part I of this two-part column appeared in the winter 2010 edition of Media. It cov- ered the following basics: Focus, story out- line, structure, leads, backing up the lead, nut graf., context, use of quotes, attribu- tion, balance and interviewing.

Here’s a writer who has a catchy lead and an excellent ending as he circles back to the beginning to complete his story in a natural and charming way:

Opening: Julian Sher is the creator of JournalismNet. He can be reached at www.journalismnet.com.

Julian Sher

One of the biggest myths about the web is that you can easily search through the speed and accuracy of search engines like Google, people assume everything on the web is easily accessible and at their fin- gerips. If they haven’t found what they’re look- ing for, they figure they’re doing some- thing wrong in their search strategy. That can often be the case – and you should check out JournalismNet’s Search Tips (www.journalismnet.com/tips) to be sure you are employing the latest, best and most relevant techniques and tricks.

But even if you’re a whiz with Google and other tools, you have to know their lim- its. Even the best search engines tap into only a small portion of the web. According to Google, the first Google index in 1998 had 26 million pages, and by 2000 Google was searching more than one billion web pages. By 2008, its engineers boasted their tool was “spidering” more than 1 trillion unique URLs.

Sounds impressive, right? It is. That’s like hunting through a stack of paper more than 5,000 miles tall – a stack that would almost stretch from Chicago to Paris trav- ellng by air. Except that the web keeps growing at a faster page rate: millions of blogs, YouTube videos, websites and other postings go up every hour.

Buried Treasures

And there is a bigger problem. All the search engines combined – Google and all its competitors – only scratch the surface of what’s out there on the Internet. The rest remains largely unexplored as buried trea- sures. That’s why it is called the “Invisible Web” or the “Deep Web.”

How big is the invisible web? Accord- ing to one search company, BrightPlanet, the invisible web could be “at least 1000 times greater than the Surface Web.” What’s buried in the invisible web? Well, obviously sites that intentionally keep their pages from being searched by search en- gine spiders – private networks, like intra- nets, like companies use for internal con- sumption; secure databases from banks and governments. Then there are public sites like universities, journals or other institu- tions that might only allow access with a password. Finally, there are what are called dy- namic searchable databases. Think about what happens when you visit a govern- ment web site that contains public informa- tion on companies and shareholders. You make a request for a listing of directors of Company ABC and up pops a list of their names and addresses. But that web page did not exist until you made that request. The same happens when you ask a univer- sity library site to find all the books about “blue whales.” The information is stored in databases, retrieved when you make a request and displayed on a web page that will disappear after you finish.

In most cases, Google and other search engines can’t spide those kinds of web pages and won’t list them in their search results.

Tools to Hunt

All is not lost. There are ways you can hunt through the invisible web. You can’t get into password-protected sites or pri- vate networks (though they sometimes get hacked or cracked). But there are ways to hunt through the many databases.

One easy trick is to just add the word database to your search keywords. For ex- ample, try a search for: “toxic chemicals” water Arizona databases.

This will get you quite different results than if you don’t put in the word “data- base,” including links to some possibly very useful databases. There are also several specialty search engines that offer ways to dig through the invisible web. One of my favorites is Info- mine (www.infomine.com), put together by librarians from the University of California and other educational centers. It contains a vast number of databases, electronic jour- nals, electronic books, bulletin boards, mailing lists, online library card catalogs, articles and directories of researchers – searchable by keyword or by topic.

Librarians in general can help you navi- gate through the invisible web and you’ll find a listing of helpful library sites at JournalismNet’s Library Help page (www. journalismnet.com/search/librarians.htm). In particular, Gary Price, a librarian and information research consultant, main- tains an excellent resource at http://www. resourcenhelf.com.

The University of Idaho also maintains a listing of over 5000 websites describing the holdings of manuscripts, archives, rare books, historical photographs, and other primary sources for the research scholar. (http://www.uiweb.uidaho.edu/special-col- lections/OtherRepositories.html)

Another valuable tool is the Directory of Open Access Journals (www.doaj.org) This service covers free, full text, quality con- trolled scientific and scholarly journals.

Finally, a site that aims to catalogue all the world’s libraries is called WorldCat (www.worldcat.org). It searches many li- braries for books and research articles and even music and videos to check out.


So don’t get discouraged. Much of the web may remain invisible, but there are ways to uncover some hidden gems. —

JournalismNet
With talk of “busty hookers,” cocaine abuse and unregistered lobbying, it was a story the likes of which journalists on Parliament Hill had never seen — or may never witness again

The Helena Guergis, Rahim Jaffer media circus

When a letter defending former M.P. Helena Guergis arrived on Ian Adams’ desk on March 28, he had his suspicions. It was the fourth letter written to Adams, editor-in-chief of the Collingwood Enterprise Bulletin, a local newspaper in Guergis’ riding. All the letters were supportive of the MP and cabinet minister, and were signed by Jessica Morgan. Adams decided to call Morgan.

Adams conducted a search on the phone number Morgan left on one letter and found it listed on a local community information centre’s website. He requested the file and found the number belonged to Jessica Craven. A previous Facebook search revealed Craven was in a relationship with a man with the surname Morgan. Bingo.

Adams called Craven to confront her. When she picked up, he asked, “Are you Jessica Morgan?” She said she’d have to call him back, but Adams asked again. She admitted her husband’s last name is Morgan.

“Told me he had a letter written to Adams, the charge was that while he was acting as solicitor for Jaffer, he had a relationship with the daughter of a man Jaffer was representing. The charge was that Jaffer had influenced her to write the letter,” Adams said.

The trouble started on September 16, 2009, when Guergis’ husband, former Conservative M.P. Rahim Jaffer, was charged with impaired driving and cocaine possession (the charges were later dropped.) The couple made headlines again on February 19 when Guergis had a meltdown at the Charlottetown Airport.

The Enterprise Bulletin published its story on Craven’s letters on March 30. Several other outlets quickly posted the news. “It took off like crazy as soon as we put it up online,” Adams said. “I was astounded by how much that got picked up. I assumed it was a slow news day.”

The story continued to unfold. On April 6 the Liberals demanded an investigation into a claim Guergis was given $800,000 for her home Rockcliffe Park, Ottawa’s wealthiest neighborhood. Two days later a report in the Toronto Star claimed Jaffer had offered to “open up” the Prime Minister’s office to Nazim Gillani and several other businessmen.

Despite Guergis’ resignation on April 9, the unspecified allegations against the former cabinet minister who the Prime Minister also kicked out of the Conservative caucus, continued. Reports on April 13 claimed Jaffer used Guergis’ office to conduct business. Three days later, it was revealed Guergis had written an e-mail in support of Wright Tech Systems, a company Jaffer was planning to take public. Another potential conflict of interest was revealed on April 29, when it emerged Jaffer had used his wife’s official e-mail for business.

“The drive was the sequence of things,” said Carleton journalism professor Paul Adams, explaining how the story became a national news scandal. “There was a build up of events.”

Though Adams said Guergis and Jaffer were well known on Parliament Hill before Jaffer’s arrest, neither were household names. Still, the couple has been the subject of countless articles and news-casts since February, surviving many news cycles. Adams said the Prime Minister’s drastic, largely unexplained firing (though she resigned, Harper made it clear that he wouldn’t have asked her to leave) of Guergis elevated the story’s prominence. The Liberals then pushed for answers, he said, which kept her name in the papers.

“The liberals have been looking hard for something to give them a lift in the polls before Jaffer’s arrest, neither were household names. Still, the couple has been the subject of countless articles and news-casts since February, surviving many news cycles. Adams said the Prime Minister’s drastic, largely unexplained firing (though she resigned, Harper made it clear that he wouldn’t have asked her to leave) of Guergis elevated the story’s prominence. The Liberals then pushed for answers, he said, which kept her name in the papers.”

The tactic didn’t work. A survey published by Ipsos on April 24 showed 35 per cent of voters still support the Conservative party, while only 29 per cent support the Liberals. “It doesn’t seem to have given them any lift,” he said.

Jaffer’s use of Guergis’ office was most important to readers, Adams said. But that wasn’t all that was reported. The sensational details, including a claim Gillani had photos of the couple amongst cocaine and “busty hookers,” made front-page news. As Jane Taber, senior parliamentary writer for the Globe and Mail, put it, “You don’t get those stories in politics very often. Certainly not in Ottawa.”

Guergis’ reputation didn’t help matters. Taber said Guergis is known as very tenacious, but added she thinks Guergis been unfairly labeled as a diva and a princess because of her fashionable clothing, good looks and gender.

“She stood out from the moment she got elected because of her looks. Politicians don’t look like her,” Taber said. “There’s a
double standard and the double standard remains. Women are judged differently from their male counterparts.”

While Guergis may have been judged unjustly, Taber believes journalists made rigorous attempts to verify the allegations, most notably Kevin Donovan at The Star. “People were being very, very careful,” she said. “I do believe the reporting was not in any way dismissive.”

For Donovan, Guergis was never the focus of the story, just one character caught in collateral damage. “I was a bit disappointed that she became so much the story,” Donovan said. “I thought the story was Gillani and Mr. Jaffer.”

By the time many journalists started working on Guergis pieces Donovan had been investigating Jaffer’s business dealings with Gillani for about a month. He said this head start provided his pieces with details not yet published in other papers.

On April 8 Donovan received a tip that the letter Guergis wrote in support of Wright Tech Systems had been published on a public website.

“I thought, ‘Oh my gosh, she’s writing about a company her husband is involved in,’” Donovan said. The next week The Star ran a piece on Jaffer’s business deals and his wife’s involvement.

The more sensational details, which many other outlets focused on, were murky at best, Donovan said. “I never believed there were pictures that Gillani had of the cabinet minister in that circumstance. Gillani tells a whole bunch of people he has photos of them in compromising situations,” he said. “Most of the things Gillani boasts about need to be taken with a grain of salt.”

Though Donovan and his team plan to continue to pursue the story as it develops, he’s now deep into other investigations. “There are a lot of equally important or more important stories in Canada to do,” he said. “I don’t think everyone needs to be fixated on this.”

If anything, Donovan hopes the Guergis story leads to more investigations into government corruption. “It would be nice to see, as a result of this, journalists focus on how governments are conducting business,” Donovan said.

As for Guergis, Ian Adams expects she will fight the allegations. “She won’t go quietly,” he said. “She’s not that type of person. She’ll fight this every step of the way.”

He expects no further letters from Jessica Morgan. M

Russ Martin is a freelance reporter and recent graduate of Ryerson’s online journalism program. His work has been published in Marketing Magazine, Toronto Star, the Ottawa Citizen and the Montreal Gazette. He has also contributed to new media publications including And-Pop, Newsify and Futuréale.

CBC investigative journalist, Harvey Cashore, recounts the 15-year odyssey that took him halfway around the globe in an attempt to follow the money trail in the Airbus affair, a sad chapter in Canadian history that may forever tarnish the reputation of former prime minister Brian Mulroney. Cashore’s journey, recounted in the pages of his new book The Truth Shows Up, was painful, surprising, and exhilarating. In an edited version of a conversation with Media magazine, Cashore discusses his odyssey and the personal price he paid in pursuit of the real story that still remains untold. We began the conversation with his explanation of why he chose to write the book as a personal journey.

Cashore: I think that on the one hand it was such a complex, convoluted story. Early on I realized the best way to tell that story was through the pursuit of it. And I think it made it more accessible. It was a story of how we got the story — and not the
Story itself.

Media: Why did you decide to write it?

Cashore: There are many different answers I could give at different times. But on a personal level, I just had to. I know we all overuse the word “closure.” But for me it was closure on a story that’s been with me for 15 years. I needed to close it for my family, my children. I needed to move ahead, and I knew I couldn’t until I put it all down. And I knew there was a story unwritten and untold about how our institutions, be they RCMP, justice, media, collective fail Canadians. And I really wanted to explain why I believe that. And why the facts prove it. And I hope that I’ve done that. Because that book will always be on someone’s shelf or on the library. And you go and get it and read about a real dark period in Canadian history. Both the story itself and how we did not deal with it properly when it came to light.

Media: What is a significant part of that unwritten story?

Cashore: I think that we do live in a bit of a banana republic. (laughing) We tend to have this idea that our democracy works pretty well. We’ve got a good political system that is very good, and that’s true. And we’ve got the media doing its job. But I think, hopefully, what this book shows is that we don’t expose our scandals and we then move on. And I think there’s a gap between what Canadians want and what they deserve, and what they get from our institutions and what governments do. And I think that the story was covered in the media in the last 15 years, it didn’t get the attention it deserved until very recently. Canadians did not tire of the story. They were interested in the idea that a former prime minister met in a hotel room with a middle man who doled out one thousand dollar bills in an envelope and that money came from Air- bus (shorthand for the deal that saw Air Canada spend more than a billion dollars to Airbush for something Mulroney’s time in power). And that was of intense interest to Canadians. I tried to explain why they didn’t get more attention paid to that story.

Media: What details about Airbus are you going to write about?

Cashore: Yes, I’ve got a lot to say about Airbus because of the link between Airbus and Air Canada. And I think it’s important to understand how much money went to Airbus and what that money did.

Media: The Oliphant Commission was uncovered and brought to light about Airbus.

Cashore: The Oliphant Commission was uncovered and brought to light about Airbus.

Media: Absolutely. It’s tragic. And I’m not overstating it here. Justice Oliphant used the word “inappropriate” to describe Airbus. And I think it’s important to understand that the biggest scandal that led to the biggest scandal, which is how can corporations, some of which are larger than countries… how can we ensure that large corporations like Airbus in the future no longer offer side-deals, grease money, bribery payments in order to make deals happen? That question was not addressed. And yet to me that is the most significant question. How can we make sure that our democracy itself is not undermined by corporations wanting to sell goods and make money.

Media: What was the hardest part in writing the book?

Cashore: The hardest part for me, because my memory isn’t very good, was going over my own notes and looking at my behavior and realizing that I might have spent too much time thinking about the story and working on the story. My last chapter dealt with this. What was this all for? I wanted to find out where the money went. I wanted to find out whether the public and me really didn’t want to find out what the truth was. What was it for? What did we accomplish? I guess we exposed the fact that our democracy is sick. That our institutions don’t work.

Media: Where were times when you had family stuff to do and work took over.

Cashore: People have accused me of being obsessive. I don’t agree. If you have a $35-million dollar lawsuit hanging over your head (Air Canada’s closest friend on earth, writing letters to Canada about the Air- bus commissions.

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Media censorship

A CULTURE OF IGNORANCE

Media censorship in the Canadian Military

A retired reservist believes army conventions have prevented military news from covering sexual assault cases, disregarding recommendations from a federal Ombudsman.

Tiffany Narducci

“The purpose is not to tell you what is going on—it is to keep youAppendix.

The words come out of Tony Keene’s mouth slowly, clearly, and with the utmost calm. A short silence ensues.

“It is to make you think you know what’s going on.”

The sobering words trigger an almost instinctive reaction to look over your shoulder. However, his troubling statements are directed to a small but vital part of our nation—the Canadian Forces. Keene, a retired reservist and journalist (for both military and civilian media), is speaking about the nation’s official military newspaper, The Maple Leaf. The newspaper came under fire in 1999, following a report to the Minister of National Defence, by Ombudsman André Marin. The document highlighted seven recommendations to reform the Canadian Forces’ policy on sexual assault. The final recommendation underscored the need for “changes to The Maple Leaf editorial policy to ensure that victims and complainants are given an opportunity to share their experience [...] when articles refer to their specific case.” Marin’s admonitions are given an opportunity to share the parties involved.”

APPEARANCES ARE DECEIVING

“It is not a newspaper.” Keene stresses. The retired reservist refers to the newspaper firstly as a military publication that tended to “accentuate the positive.” As a civilian journalist, Keene was able to compare The Maple Leaf’s operations to that of a local newspaper: there were no reporters, no editors assigning stories. Instead, a small group of six individuals received various contributions from military public information offices across Canada and distributed these additions to bases nationwide.

Employees of The Maple Leaf were expected to publish the information verbatim and were subjected to criticism from their superiors if they disobeyed. “It is completely contradictory to the idea of a newspaper.” Keene says, slowing his words again and speaking carefully. “You don’t even think about getting the other side of the story [...] there is no journalism or editorial judgement being practiced.”

Retired Colonel, lawyer and recurrent contributor to Esprit de Corps magazine, Michel Drapeau agrees with Keene’s statements. He believes The Maple Leaf is a ‘corporate bulletin’ presented in the guise of a newspaper.

“We have to keep in mind, particularly when we have Canadian soldiers and civilians deployed abroad, their only source of news may be The Maple Leaf [...] We are providing a disservice to our soldiers by presenting a distorted view—only the good news, and only what the department wants you to hear is presented.”

Drapeau goes on to explain that the newspaper could never operate in an objective and unbiased manner since its staff is solely comprised of military personnel who owe loyalty to their employer, the Department of National Defence. He says that, as a public-funded periodical, The Maple Leaf deserves a “buffer” in order to operate as transparently as a civilian media outlet.

“You should have an editorial board made up of individuals that are not on the [DND] payroll who would put out an editorial policy and occasionally invite the public, because we’re paying for it, to have access to this public organ.” says Drapeau. “This document has to become for the public good, and the public good is not defined by or restricted to the senior management of DND.”

Although Keene disagrees with the way The Maple Leaf chooses to operate, he is also quick to explain that there is no harmful intent behind the paper’s strategy. He says the newspaper operates on a ‘need-to-know basis’, selectively choosing news stories in order to minimize concerns and alarm among military personnel. The main objective, he says, is to keep the mission going.

IGNORANCE IS BLISS

Keeping the mission going, how-ever, seems to come at the loss of free speech. In stark contrast to Marin’s recommendation, The Maple Leaf’s 2005 to 2008 archive holds only a single article on the issue of sexual assault. During this three-year period, a 2000 report by the Department of National Defence (DND) highlighted 157 such charges laid in military bases across Canada, with several hundred other allegations. The sole article written by Captain Mark Giles in 2005, does not disclose information about a specific allegation or case. Rather, it is a briefing on how the military should disclose information to the civilian media about high-profile issues, including sexual assault.

“Oh, they have policies on everything and they all read wonderfully,” says Keene. “These lists are put out so when someone like you asks questions, they have something to show. They are not there to be enforced until someone gets caught, until something goes wrong.”

Following The Maple Leaf’s lead, the military has been reluctant to comment on Marin’s recommendations. DND chaplain Heather Smith offered only a brief statement before declining any further comment.

“Sexual assault is no more prevalent in the Canadian Forces than in the general population [...] Yes, it exists and it is taken very seriously.”

The type of glossed-over news coverage The Maple Leaf offers is not necessary to the well-being of soldiers, according to Keene. He points to the example of The Stars and Stripes, the official newspaper of the United States military. During their stay in Vietnam in 1965, the newspaper was censored by the U.S. government after reporters unveiled black market trading, drug use and racism amongst American soldiers. In an unprecedented move, the newspaper filed a suit against the U.S. district court in Washington, accusing Secretary of Defence Robert McNamara of violating its right to free speech. In 1967 The Stars and Stripes won the case. Since then, The Stars and Stripes has since been covering such issues as fraud, drug use and sexual assault—a far cry from the ‘feel good’ reporting of the newspaper’s Canadian counterpart.

CULTURE SHOCK

For the most part, Canadian civilian

newspapers fall in line behind the notions of free speech and public awareness. What makes The Maple Leaf deviate from the ranks of non-military media, says Keene, is culture. After serving the Canadian Forces for four decades, Major Tony Keene was deeply entrenched in reservist lifestyle.

“It is almost compulsory.” he says “The people being victimized within bases keep it out of the public eye. [...] They can do things to you—if any other employer tried these things, they would end up in front of a Human Rights Tribunal.”

It all comes to ensuring the completion of military aims. According to Keene, in criminal cases put before a military court “the victim is irrelevant.” The focus is largely on the accused, in order to punish them and get them back in the ranks as quickly as possible. Victims, says Keene, are important only as long as they are evidence.

“If any report on a sexual assault actually did surface in The Maple Leaf, this is why we would never think to seek the other side of the story. This is why no victim would come forward to discuss their case.”

In order to guarantee the accomplishment of its goals, says Keene, the DND must always ensure morale is at its highest level. Following this line of thought, the military newspaper is careful to avoid straying into controversial or negative reporting. A strategy Colonel Drapeau believes is largely futile.

“The soldiers don’t rely on [The Maple Leaf]. It plays a role, but I’d be hard pressed to say what role it plays.”

Keene adamantly resists that the intention of the military is not malicious. The doctors, nurses, and chaplains in the Canadian Forces, he says, are every bit as caring as their civilian counterparts. But until The Maple Leaf abandons its current reporting style, Marin’s recommendations will continue getting dust. Victims and defendants will remain voiceless, and public awareness will be undermined.

“It is a disciplinary system, in which the main goal is regulating conduct and the victim is by and large meaningless,” says Keene. “It sounds brutal, doesn’t it?”

Tiffany Narducci studies journalism at Carleton University. She’s entering her summer

FOLLOW ORDERS: Employees of The Maple Leaf were expected to publish the information verbatim and were subjected to criticism from their superiors if they disobeyed.

SUMMER 2010

Who’s got your back
Source Building

Getting people to open up

Developing sources takes time. So be sure to develop a plan. Charles Rusnell

Knowing how to build and maintain sources is critical to enterprise and investigative reporting. And even for those who don’t aspire to in-depth reporting, it’s what separates an exceptional reporter from the merely adequate.

A little goes a long way. Here are a few tips for building sources:

- **Know Your Audience**: Understand the motivations and incentives behind the information you are seeking.
- **Be Trustworthy**: Establish trust through repeated contact and consistent follow-up.
- **Offer Value**: Provide sources with value in return for their information.
- **Be Persistent**: Don’t give up easily. Persistence pays off.
- **Use a System**: Keep your sources organized and accessible.

Knowing how to build and maintain sources requires a fundamental understanding of how the situation works. Sources like talking about where they work; it’s part of human nature.

All the best reporters I know don’t leave source building to chance. They have a method. Because source building is a function of a person’s personality, everyone should develop their own method. But here are a few basic techniques I have learned and adapted over the past 25 years.

**Establish a System**

You can’t build and maintain sources without some kind of system for keeping track of them. I put mine in an individual searchable word file, and conglomerated in one main word file so I can email it to myself and my colleagues. I also keep a copy in my CBC email and in my BlackBerry. Whatever system you choose, it should be electronic, searchable and have enough space to put in personal information about the source such as his hobbies, where he drinks, or the fact that his kids play hockey.

I try to key in every contact as soon as I get one. Take the time because it pays off in the long run. I have sources from 1983.

**Ask for Numbers**

You should ask every person you deal with for all their contact information, including numbers, email addresses, etc. I always say, “Is there a number I can get you at after hours if I need to fact check, or if my editor has questions?” Very few people will say no. Always ask for cell numbers even if you don’t think you will get them. You would be surprised who will give you their number.

**Learn Everything You Can About People**

Write down the details about the individual so you remember them. This allows you to make a personal connection every time you call them for information. I will Google a person’s name to try find their hobbies, the associations they belong to, the professional organizations, the charities they support. During conversation, I will ask about their kids. If they play competitive sports, I ask how they are doing. I write down their wife’s name, and most especially their secretary.

**Ticke List**

Keep a list of your best sources and call them every few months just to chat, a check-up on what is going on. I actually say, “I should know about it!" Call them for a drink every once in awhile, especially if you have a good joke to tell. People love to laugh.

**Work Your Network**

Learn their networks because that is how you grow your sources exponentially. Find out who they associate with because they can put you onto other sources.

**Use One Source to “Book” Another**

Ask every source to recommend someone else you should talk to. Make it a habit to say, “Is there anyone else I should talk to about this?” One source begets another. I actually ask sources to call other sources and vouch for me and they do it.

**Accuracy**

You will never build sources if you are a sloppy reporter. Why would a source talk to you again or vouch for you with someone else if you get it wrong? That seems self-evident but I can tell you I know reporters who my sources will not talk to. They don’t trust them.

Sources will actually check you out. My former investigative partner called a national behavioural analyst at the RCMP crime lab in Ottawa and when he called her back he said he was prepared to talk because he had checked her out with the people he knew in Edmonton, spell and pronounce their names correctly.

**Fact Check**

Call your source before the story appears and hell tell him or her generally what you plan to use and the context within which you are going to use it. I often do this before I leave the interview. You should also explain that you have or will who may change what you plan to use. You should also explain that fact checking doesn’t give them the right to change something they don’t like.

Fact checking builds trust, especially in television and radio. Think about it. We interview people for 20 minutes or more and then use 20 or 30 seconds. It’s nerve-wracking for them. Fact checking builds trust and shows you are an up-front reporter.

Some people don’t believe in fact checking – it may even be banned by policy. But many news outlets say, “I should know about it!" Call them for a drink every once in awhile, especially if you have a good joke to tell. People love to laugh.

When you mislead sources about your intentions, you undermine not only your reputation, but that of your news organization and all reporters.

Charles Rusnell is an investigative reporter and producer for CBC News Edmonton. Charles began his career at The Ottawa Citizen. After a decade in the nation’s capital, he moved back west to The Edmonton Journal. In 2008 he made the transition to television and radio broadcasting, joining the team at CBC Edmonton. During his nearly 25 years as a journalist, Charles has broken some of Alberta’s, and Canada’s, biggest stories.
A few months of bidding, the deal was snatched by Canwest Global Communications Corp. agreed to sell its publishing division to a group of unsecured creditors who have appointed National Post president and CEO Paul Godfrey as the new company’s chief executive.

So now there is some certainty. The secured creditors get their money. And once the new company emerges from creditor protection, it plans to sell the papers in what is called an initial public offering (IPO) as early as this summer.

What’s uncertain is how many of the papers, including the Vancouver Sun, Edmonton Journal, Ottawa Citizen and Montreal Gazette, end up being sold. The new owners will be more inclined to cut costs or invest in content. It’s also unclear who might emerge to buy specific papers in the remaining structure and then issue an initial public offering (IPO). So they will put the company out on the stock market. An important thing in that listing, they would get back the money they once borrowed from the banks. They would get their money back, potentially with some interest.

The director of Carleton University’s magazine. The following is an edited version of our conversation.

Media: What are we to make of these developments?
Waddell: When the banks took over CanWest, they had no interest in hanging on to it for a long period of time. They just wanted to get their money back that they loaned to CanWest. So they were looking for someone who came along with the most cash and take over the company. They found them with this group of hedge funds. That was the moment they realized that, potentially, CanWest had when it was running the company. We won’t know the details until we see how the deal is structured.

Media: And the new owners will try to raise money by going public?
Waddell: They were unsecured creditors. So had the whole thing collapsed, they would have got nothing out of it. They bought the company. They’ve asked Paul Godfrey to be in charge of it. They will restructure and then issue an initial public offering (IPO). So they will put the company out on the stock market. An important thing in that listing, they would get back the money they once borrowed from the banks. They would get their money back, potentially with some interest.

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Media: Will they hold on to the National Post?
Waddell: There are some core elements to this company: the National Post, the Montreal Gazette, the Ottawa Citizen, Edmonton Journal and Calgary Herald. And Vancouver Sun, and maybe the Vancouver Journal will be one of the major media markets in the country with the exception of Winnipeg and Atlantic Canada and Saskatchewan.

They own also the Windsor Star, but were they to put that on the market you could easily see the Toronto Star be interested in purchasing that. They (TorStar) have the Toronto Star, the Hamilton Spectator and the Kitchener-Waterloo Record, so you can see them trying to expand their Metropoli

tan city newspaper empire into Southwestern Ontario. The other group of assets that might be put on the block at some point is a group of community newspapers that CanWest owns, largely in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. And that could be an attractive purchase for David Black, who is a regional newspaper owner. It could also be a purchase for TorStar through its Metroland newspaper division. And there are other companies that have community and weekly newspapers that might be interesting. At the moment, Mr. Godfrey has indicated that he wants to keep the whole company together, the question he has to calculate is, are those individual assets worth more being sold separately.

Media: So it will strictly be a business decision?
Waddell: Sure, the people who bought the papers want to get their original money back. You do a buyout where you borrow money, you pay everyone, you organize things, and then you sell and hope you make more money selling it to the market than it cost you to buy the assets in the first place.

Media: And what do we know about the owners?
Waddell: Not very much. They’re hedge funds and a bunch of other money people, who don’t have a long-term or vested interest in the newspaper business. It’s all about money and business. It’s not about making a civic statement or policy questions, or should have raised serious public policy questions about whether one newspaper can actually own all the newspapers in Canada. They also own 20 percent of CTV Globe Media. And I think there’s a pretty good public policy argument to suggest that that’s not a good public policy.

Media: So what does all this mean for the journalists at CanWest?
Waddell: I believe that’s what they could take and run centrally they ran centrally. Publishers had less and less ability to shape their news organizations, because we know that they are much broader in the sports section, have to cut X number of dollars from your ability and more control to shape their own报纸. The other thing is the equipment to produce newspapers in Canada. They also own another newspaper, the Calgary Herald, which has been unprofitable for a decade of cutting. So whether the new hedge fund owners will want to reduce the profitability by making investments in people, which allows them to produce magazine content, is going to be an interesting question.

Media: Is there not a realization that it’s necessary to spend money?
Waddell: That will be my guess. But we’ll have to see.

Media: Or it may be that they rob Peter to pay Paul. That is, just take money from another part of the newspaper to beef up content?
Waddell: That’s essentially the policy that we’ve seen in the States, which is that’s the policy that most media owners have undertaken in the last few years, which is this faulty logic that you can reduce the number of journalists and the number of people who run the front desk and two other people. That takes away the ability of the newspapers to figure in the world around them.

Media: So how are we to characterize this buyout?
Waddell: First of all, newspapers aren’t dead. They’re a long way from being dead. I think they are going to evolve into being news organizations. And that means that they will have to be doing things that they never have done before, such as the basics, like wire service you can get that stuff anywhere, anytime during the day.
Erica was looking for a place to live with her husband and six kids. The family settled on a town home in Ottawa’s Heron Gate community, attracted by the excellent reputation of the service and the indoor and outdoor swimming pool. The pool was particularly appealing for Erica. Most parents know how efficient they can be for tiring out rowdy kids. They moved in shortly after TransGlobe Property Management bought the properties and for a short time, the positive reputation of the previous owners still clung to the community.

It took a few months for the community to really notice, but things almost immediately started to deteriorate when TransGlobe took over. Residents complained that garbage was piling up almost everywhere: in the parking garages, next to the garbage chutes, even in the laundry room.

One resident showed us pictures of the garbage spilling across the floor next to the washer and dryer. “This is where they want me to clean my clothes,” he said.

The outdoor pool had been empty since Erica moved in.

In 2007 Erica Marx was looking for a place to live with her husband and six kids. The family settled on a town home in Ottawa’s Heron Gate community, attracted by the excellent reputation of the service and the indoor and outdoor swimming pool. The pool was particularly appealing for Erica. Most parents know how efficient they can be for tiring out rowdy kids. They moved in shortly after TransGlobe Property Management bought the properties and for a short time, the positive reputation of the previous owners still clung to the community.

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The outdoor pool had been empty since Erica moved in.

There was a shopping cart parked in its depths when we visited last year. The pump of the indoor pool broke and went unnoticed and unrepaird by the landlord, sending five children to hospital with chlorine poisoning. The high-rises were ridden with insufficient heat complaints in the winter, residents were losing hot water in their units, and necessary repairs would go unheeded by the property management.

Erica says the area has become a slum and that she doesn’t feel that her home is safe for her kids. A CBC investigation of the area brought attention to a community that doesn’t feel that her home is safe for her kids.

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Endangered Families: Erica Marx has lived in Heron Gate with her children for nearly three years. She says the condition of the neighbourhood is a threat to her kids. Recently, Erica’s son was given an electric shock by a broken lamp post.

A Dangerous Hood: Burnt-out cars adorn the parking lot in Heron Gate. The cars were damaged by a garage fire over a year ago, and have since yet to be removed. They have become a fixture in the neighbourhood. The company severed the electric connection to the post the next day, but left the broken lamp on the ground. Later, the owner was able to salvage the light bulb.

Erica’s involvement with the community advocacy group, ACORN, opened up a new avenue to tenants who were willing to talk. We contacted the group who connected us with two more tenants who were willing to go on the record.

The first was France Phidd. She invited us into her apartment building to see the damag—first-hand. We documented images of garbage, broken elevators, holes in the ceilings, and broken doors and lights. What we couldn’t document was the stench of unattended garbage, the stench of unattended garbage, the stench of unattended garbage, the stench of unattended garbage.

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degrees celsius. France ushered us into her apartment quickly, trying not to let the cool air from her air conditioner rush out.

Before France, we spoke with another resident who had documented all his complaints in writing and with photographs.

Mid-way through our interview his wife asked that we not identify the family. They were trying to leave the complex but were accompanied by a security guard.

City Loopholes

We knew our readers and listeners would appreciate seeing where neglect is occurring a penalty.

Right now I'm researching finding another place to live myself. I've tried to dig my heels in and try to make the place better... but I realised that it was ineffectual and that I wasn't able to make any changes that way,” she said.

Fines may not be taking a toll on TransGlobe’s pocketbook, but there are other consequences for neglecting your residents. The complex is emptying quickly, trying not to let the cool air from her air conditioner rush out.

France ushered us into her apartment quickly, trying not to let the cool air from her air conditioner rush out.

City councillors seem to recognize that there is a problem, but they are loathe to act for fear of punishing all landlords for the transgressions of a few. Unfortunately, the public policy has not caught up with the needs of the residents, which means that people like Erica Marx are choosing to leave.

“This story is powerful, and stirred up a lot of emotion. I think that by presenting the story as we did online made it much more powerful. We were able to use the tenants’ own voices to describe their living conditions. The pain and disappointment in their voices came across in a way that plain text can’t express. Having photos from their apartments run at the same time really underlined the suffering these people had gone through.

We hear about horrible news all the time and I think we’ve become desensitized to it. To actually be able to see these people and hear their stories goes a long way to understanding what they are going through.

And with radio I find that you can’t always get the whole story out there. This allowed us to show the city’s and TransGlobe’s response in full in addition to the tenants’ stories. It really was a good balanced report.”

Laura Osman and Stuart Thomson are Ottawa-based freelance investigative journalists.

The Investigation

A data set provided us a goldmine to dig up this story. But before we could begin to interpret it, we had to clean it up. We were lucky to have a relatively well-structured spreadsheet provided to us, but it still took hours of work.

Specifically, we needed to split a column of data that contained two entries, the neighbourhood and the address. We needed to interpret those entries separately, so we delimited the column by space, and combined the cells that belonged together.

One column was mixed bag, containing entries for neighbourhood and address, so we used an “IF” statement to pull all of the neighbourhood entries into a different column. In plain English: if the cell in the combined column contained any of the words relating to a neighbourhood (e.g.: Old Ottawa,) put that entry in a new column.

It took a few hours, but cleaning up the entry was worth it.

Having organized, structured data was the foundation of our story, and it allows us to return to the data as a reference for other housing stories in the future.

Our online presentation was crucial. And for that we turned to Lucas Timmons, who packaged the story on the web for us. He talks about the power of the interactive web. “This story is powerful, and stirred up a lot of emotion. I think that by presenting the story as we did online made it much more powerful. We were able to use the tenants’ own voices to describe their living conditions. The pain and disappointment in their voices came across in a way that plain text can’t express. Having photos from their apartments run at the same time really underlined the suffering these people had gone through.

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The Fine Print

A Serious Message to Bloggers
The Supreme Court of Canada says they better work hard to get it right

Dean Jobb

Canada’s highest court has elevated bloggers – the serious ones, at least – to the level of mainstream journalists. And this is good and not-so-good news for bloggers, because with rights come responsibilities.

In December the Supreme Court of Canada created a new libel defence, responsible communication, on matters of public interest. In essence, it offers “no-fault” protection from libel lawsuits for those who publish reports on important issues, even if facts or allegations turn out to be wrong and someone has been defamed in the process.

The court deliberately chose the name “responsible communication” instead of “responsible journalism” to signal that the defence applies to “anyone who publishes material of public interest in any medium,” not just journalists working for traditional news outlets.

This is not a seismic shift in the law. Posting comments on a blog or other online forum that damages someone’s reputation has always carried the same risk of a libel suit as printing them in a newspaper or broadcasting them on radio or television. But this still comes as a surprise to some in the social-media crowd. A poll conducted last fall found more than one-quarter of Canadian respondents had no idea they were legally responsible for libelous material distributed through networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace and Twitter.

The Supreme Court of Canada says they better work hard to get it right. Reporting comments on a blog or other online forum that damages someone’s reputation has always carried the same risk of a libel suit as printing them in a newspaper or broadcasting them on radio or television. But this still comes as a surprise to some in the social-media crowd. A poll conducted last fall found more than one-quarter of Canadian respondents had no idea they were legally responsible for libelous material distributed through networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace and Twitter.

The Supreme Court has little interest in what you tweet or share with your Facebook friends. But it does see the online reports that touch on politics, business, science, the arts, the environment and even religious and moral issues. The court is emphatic on one point: the public interest “is not synonymous with what interests the public” and does not include “more curiosity or prurient interest” in the private lives of public figures or celebrities.

As noted at the outset, the defence is intended to protect serious bloggers dealing with serious subjects. Posts to www.politiciansareweasels.com or www.starsbehaving-badly.com are unlikely to make the grade. If a post is found to deal with a subject of public interest, the blogger faces a new hurdle. A jury will be asked to assess whether the blogger acted reasonably and responsibly. Were steps taken to verify the information? Are the sources solid and trustworthy? Was an effort made to report all sides of the story and to interview the person defamed?

Those sound a lot like the elements of good journalism. They are, and bloggers will be held to these standards.

Chief Justice Beverley McLachlin, who wrote both rulings, could find no rationale for excluding bloggers and other online commentators simply because they lack a journalism degree or the backing of a news organization. “Those new disseminators of news and information should…be subject to the same laws as established media outlets.”

Time for the not-so-good news. McLachlin says these newcomers will be held to these same standards of accuracy, fairness, thorough reporting and ethical conduct as mainstream journalists.

“The press and others engaged in public communication on matters of public interest, like bloggers, must act carefully, having regard to the injury to reputation that a false statement can cause,” she wrote. “People in public life are entitled to expect the media and other reporters will act responsibly in protecting them from false accusations and innuendo.”

First, a blogger will have to establish that posted information deals with a matter of public interest. The court’s definition of the public interest is broad, including religious and moral issues. The court is not swayed by reports that touch on politics, business, science, the arts, the environment and even the private lives of public figures or celebrities.

As noted at the outset, the defence is intended to protect serious bloggers dealing with serious subjects. Posts to www.politiciansareweasels.com or www.starsbehaving-badly.com are unlikely to make the grade. If a post is found to deal with a subject of public interest, the blogger faces a new hurdle. A jury will be asked to assess whether the blogger acted reasonably and responsibly. Were steps taken to verify the information? Are the sources solid and trustworthy? Was an effort made to report all sides of the story and to interview the person defamed?

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Matthew Nied, a B.C. law student and author of the Defamation Law Blog, thinks few bloggers will be able to take advantage of the new defence. While many are diligent and act in good faith, “they are generally not guided by established journalistic norms,” he noted in a January 25 post.

“For example, although journalists will generally make a point of seeking the plaintiff’s side of the story and speaking directly to witnesses and experts, non-journalist bloggers – who are generally unwarp for their efforts – will rarely have the time, resources, training, or willingness to do so.”

Putting in the extra work needed to unearth and verify information would make blogs better, and that’s what the Supreme Court is encouraging – good journalism, no matter who’s tapping the keyboard. The standards by which journalists and non-journalists alike will be judged will evolve over time, the court acknowledged, “to keep pace with the norms of new communications media.”

But fairness, balance and thorough, original reporting on matters of public interest will remain the starting point for any assessment of what’s considered responsible communication, online and off.

Dean Jobb, author of Media Law for Canadians (Emond Montgomery Publications), is an associate professor of journalism at the University of King’s College in Halifax. He can be reached at djobb@dal.ca.
Was the high court’s ruling in the Andrew McIntosh case a bad day for journalism? ...Not really

Dean Jobb

The next-day headlines focused on the Supreme Court of Canada’s refusal to give journalists the constitutional right to protect sources, but they didn’t tell the whole story. There’s good news for journalists in the court’s May 7 ruling (R. v. National Post, 2010 SCC 16) in the case of the National Post, its former reporter Andrew McIntosh, and the possibly forged document at the heart of a nine-year legal battle to protect a source.

Chances were slim that the court would grant blanket protection to the relationship between journalists and sources. The law treats the information passed between lawyers and their clients as “privileged,” but not even medical records or a confession to a priest enjoys this kind of hands-off treatment.

It was possible the court would make it tougher to unmask sources, and require those seeking to identify a source to prove that a promise of confidentiality should be ignored. But that argument was rejected – it remains up to the journalist to show that a source is worthy of protection.

The court did find that journalists like McIntosh – who promised to protect a key source behind his so-called Shawinigate investigation into former prime minister Jean Chrétien’s business dealings – can claim the right to protect a source on a case-by-case basis.

The crucial factor is whether protecting the source is more important than ensuring crimes are properly investigated or that a court hearing a criminal case or lawsuit has access to the information needed to ensure justice is done.

In McIntosh’s case, eight of nine judges found it was more important to try to find out whether a bank document the source leaked to McIntosh was a forgery, designed to implicate Chrétien in a conflict of interest. The RCMP wanted to test the document for fingerprints or traces of DNA that could identify who created or leaked it. Even though the court acknowledged these forensic tests may fail, it authorized the police to seize and examine the document.

While this is bad news for McIntosh and the Post, here’s the good news for the rest of us:

§ Justice Ian Binnie’s majority ruling recognized the “special position” of the media, given the Charter’s guarantee of freedom of the press, and said judges should strive to “protect the media’s secret sources where such protection is in the public interest.”

§ The court accepted the media’s position that confidential sources play a crucial role in news coverage, especially investigative journalism. “Unless the media can offer anonymity in situations where sources would otherwise dry up, freedom of expression in debate on matters of public interest would be badly compromised,” Binnie said. “Important stories will be left untold.”

§ Investigative journalism plays a vital role in addressing the “democratic deficit in the transparency and accountability of our public institutions” the court noted, shining “the light of public scrutiny on the dark corners” of public and private institutions.

§ Justice Binnie identified a number of important stories that came to light thanks to confidential sources or whistleblowers, including the tainted tuna scandal, secret commissions paid on Air Canada’s purchase of Airbus jets, and concerns over restaurants in Toronto and illegal slaughterhouses in Ontario. Without “the free flow of accurate and pertinent information” on such issues, he wrote, “democratic institutions and social justice will suffer.”

§ The ruling also recognizes that, when an arrangement necessarily carries an element of risk, “is that no journalist can give a source a total assurance of confidentiality. All such arrangements necessarily carry an element of risk that the source’s identity will eventually be revealed.”

The court noted, citing the case of a White House official who leaked information to The New York Times in order to attack a critics. “The bottom line,” Justice Binnie noted, “is that no journalist can give a source a total assurance of confidentiality. All such arrangements necessarily carry an element of risk that the source’s identity will eventually be revealed.”

In order words, be careful what you promise – and make sure the story and the information are important enough to justify the risk.

Dean Jobb is an associate professor of journalism at the University of King’s College in Halifax and author of Media Law for Canadian Journalists (Emond Montgomery Publications)
Making it harder to obtain government data
Some departments are failing in their duty to help journalists

Fred Vallance-Jones

The Harper government is taking its control freakishness to new levels as officials have found a new way to shut down access to electronic data under the Access to Information Act. A quiet battle is underway that, if the government wins, is going to put us firmly back into the paper and pencil days.

It hasn’t gone smoothly, but journalists have been obtaining data from federal departments since the mid 1990s. Occasionally institutions would make the case that computerized information didn’t meet the definition of a record under the act, but once reminded of the actual definition, they’d back off.

Other arguments would be offered, as they are in other cases, but eventually a disk would land on the reporter’s desk.

Fast forward to 2010, and it seems we’re back to 1990. I’m getting reports from several journalists who work with electronic records that institutions across government are responding to requests for data by releasing data printouts on paper or by converting spreadsheet tables or database reports into image files before releasing them. Often no explanation is provided; it’s just done.

Even those of you who don’t work with data all of the time will have guessed that you can’t analyze a paper or image file with a computer. The whole point of asking for electronic data is to be able to analyze the data, to find stories that will help shine light on the operations of government.

The new normal when it comes to media relations in Ottawa is that the people who used to talk to reporters now communicate by memo and email. Requests for information are met with a standard, “can you send me an email on that?” response. This is usually followed by a period of silence, before the “answers” arrive by return email. The results usually look like they’ve been produced by a committee intent on squeezing out every last morsel of meaning.

That’s the kind of sanitized pablum I received from Treasury Board when I had the temerity to ask about this trend in releasing electronic information—which can be analyzed, sliced and diced to reveal all sorts of hidden truths—let’s consider the possibility officials are just covering their rear flank. Treasury Board told me is that government officials now feel they have discretion to stop releasing information in electronic form unless they could be sure any information severed because it could be exempted stayed severed. A department had messed up when it released some paper records in scanned electronic form. Sensitive information the department thought it had blacked out could be recovered. The information was material that legitimately should be severed, and I am told officials went ballistic when they discovered it had been accidentally disclosed. Hence, the directive on electronic records. Release at your peril.

Most departments, for perfectly legitimate reasons related to productivity, have started to use systems that allow records to be processed on a computer screen and released as image pdfs on disk instead of on paper. Of course, the image pdf files so created are static, so anything removed stays removed. And departments seem to have decided that all records should be processed this way, even records that start out in databases. The fact that converting electronic records to images pdfs torpedoes the ability of journalists to do important stories in the public interest just is a coincidence. Collateral damage as they say in warfare.

I see a big collision coming. This one is headed to the Information Commissioner, in fact I know of complaints that have already been filed. After that, I wouldn’t be surprised if this ended up in the federal court. I would argue it is the commissioner who should take it there if the issue isn’t resolved at the complaint level. A fundamental principle of democracy is at stake here. Access to Information legislation, the purpose of which the Supreme Court has said, is to facilitate democracy, isn’t much use if officials can invent new reasons at whim to frustrate the people who use the act in the name of that democracy. I say enough.

Fred Vallance-Jones is assistant professor of journalism at University of King’s College in Halifax. His research interests include access to information in Canada.

Government officials now feel they have discretion as to whether they will honour a request for electronic records. In other words, they are reserving the right to release the information in whatever form they like.

Computer-Assisted Reporting

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Dateline Hong Kong 2010

A Working Fellowship for Canadian Journalists

Hong Kong, Asia’s world city, is a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of the People’s Republic of China, run by Hong Kong people under the “One Country, Two Systems” principle. Hong Kong is one of the most open, externally oriented economies in the world.

With China’s unprecedented economic growth, Hong Kong has been used as the gateway to the robust Mainland market. It has also served as the springboard for the Mainland companies to go overseas. Hong Kong has been rated the world’s freest economy by the Heritage Foundation and Fraser Institute.

Working journalists are invited to experience Hong Kong and report on various aspects of the city by applying for the “Dateline Hong Kong Fellowship” jointly organized by the Canadian Association of Journalists (CAJ) and the Hong Kong Economic & Trade Office in Canada.

Selected journalists will be awarded a package which includes a five-day visit program, business-class air travel and hotel accommodation.

Application must reach:
The Canadian Association of Journalists
1106 Wellington Street, P.O. Box 36030
Ottawa, ON. K1Y 4V3

by Thursday, July 30, 2010

For enquiries, please contact:
John Dickins, Executive Director, CAJ at email: dickins-john@rogers.com or Stephen Siu, Assistant Director (Public Relations), Hong Kong Economic & Trade Office, at (416)924-5544 or email: stephen_siu@hkctotoronto.gov.hk

In Hong Kong, the journalists will have the opportunity to visit various points of interest and meet with people of diverse views and backgrounds.

Neither the Hong Kong Government nor the CAJ will impose any control over or rights to the work of the participating journalists. The journalists will enjoy full editorial freedom.

Each application must include a resume, and a written statement of support from the editor/producer of designed media organization to publish/broadcast at least three Hong Kong stories produced by the selected journalists within six months upon completion of the trip.

The proposal can concentrate on any area of life in Hong Kong, including business, politics, infrastructural development, IT, tourism, education, culture and environment, etc.

Selection of the successful candidates will be made by CAJ and announced mid-August 2010. The visit program must be completed before the end of March 2011.

Jennifer Figge

Swam across the Atlantic Ocean last year. The 56-year-old American dragged herself onto a beach in Trinidad roughly a month after paddling away from the Cape Verde Islands near Africa.

Her amazing story was covered by hundreds of newspapers around the world and inspired an almost universal reaction among readers: “That’s unbelievable!” Yes, it is. That’s because it wasn’t true.

We often mess up number-based stories because we fail to heed our own good instincts. If a story doesn’t feel right, or doesn’t pass the ill-defined “smell test,” we automatically dig deeper – unless it is a number story.

Here’s a quick tip sheet on how to check the numbers in a story if your instincts tell you something is wrong. Most of the time, your hunch will lead you to an error of credibility, correlation or calculation.

Credibility: Where did the number come from? Sources spout numbers all the time and sometimes people just make them up. Find out how your source got that number. Is he or she really in a position to know?

It isn’t just spin doctors who offer up suspect data. Well-respected organizations sometimes repeat numbers that they honestly believe are true, but aren’t.

Take the Ontario Medical Association. It put out a position statement in 2004 that repeated the well-known fact that second-hand smoke is 23 times more toxic in an automobile. This spring, two Australian researchers tried to trace the science behind that claim. Writing in the Canadian Medical Association Journal, Ross MacKenzie and Becky Freeman, of the University of Sydney School of Public Health, say that the “23 times” figure did not come from research, but from a lobby group in Denver, Colorado. It was first published in the Rocky Mountain News and then widely repeated, even in reputable medical journals.

Correlation: The maxim is that correlation does not equal causation. Just because two numbers rise or fall in tandem does not mean that one causes the other.

Correlation stories are tricky, because causation is hard to prove even when it does exist. The tobacco industry dismissed the rate of heart attack hospitalizations in Toronto and Thunder Bay both declined by exactly 28 per cent during the period. The decline in angina hospitalizations in Toronto and Durham were also almost identical, at 59 and 60 per cent.

When looking at correlation, think about what else might have caused the trend. In the case of the hospitalization story, could it have been changes in available medical treatment, such as new drugs to manage illness at home? What were pollution trends at home? What were pollution trends at home? What were pollution trends at home? What were pollution trends at home? What were pollution trends at home? What were pollution trends at home? What were pollution trends at home? What were pollution trends at home? What were pollution trends at home?

When presented with a correlation story, look for a valid comparison to prove the theory, and think about what else might have caused the trend. It is unlikely, for example, that an increase in the number of police officers will quickly affect crime rates. It is unlikely that the election of a new provincial government will quickly affect the provincial economy. When presented with a correlation story, rely on your common sense.

Calculation: This is the easiest type of error to spot and fix. When there is a number in a story, check it. There is a calculation in a story, check it.

Let’s look at the case of last year’s baby boomer superhero, Jennifer Figge. She left Cape Verde Islands on Jan. 12 and landed in Trinidad on Feb. 7. Her journey took 27 days, and she told reporters that she swam up to eight hours a day.

The distance between the Cape Verde Islands and Trinidad is 3,380 kilometers, so that means Figge swam 125 kilometers per day. If she swam for eight hours each day, that is 15.7 kilometers per hour. That’s pretty fast. Those who don’t swim might want to compare Figge’s pace to world-record holders. The current world record for the men’s 100-meter freestyle sprint is 47 seconds, a pace that translates to 7.7 kilometers per hour. That means Figge swam twice as fast as the world-record holder, and she did it for eight hours a day.

In other words, she didn’t do it. Yet the story ran in hundreds of media outlets around the world.

It didn’t take long for readers to point out the error in the story. The corrections began on Feb. 9, and sparked many explorations of why people exaggerate their claims to the media, and how shameful that is. The corrections didn’t spark much exploration of the media’s role in this ruse.

Sixty seconds with a calculator would have proven that Figge’s claim was fantasy and killed the story before it ever ran.

So the next time you are presented with a story that sounds unbelievable terrific, check the numbers behind the news. Is the data reliable? Has your source misconstrued the cause of a correlation? Whip out that calculator and do the math yourself.
Using Google can be better than hiring a private eye. And cheaper, too.

Strategies for tracking down sources online

Lucas Timmons

With investigative journalism, especially when the topic is sensitive, finding sources can be hard. Some people don’t want the truth to come out. Others are scared of the repercussions if they speak. With the Internet and today’s culture of speed over accuracy, what I’ve found is a lot of distrust towards the media. People are scared to talk, or give information.

How then, do you find people when no one will talk to you? Online search tools make finding someone much easier, even when no one will talk to you. The method described here took me less time than it will probably take you to read how it was done. Don’t use this as a step-by-step guide, but rather a framework in which you can operate.

I recently worked on a series of gun stories during an internship at the CBC. The RCMP was confiscating weapons that owners had legally held for years. We needed some visuals of an owner with this weapon. People were scared to talk, or give information. And since I had pictures and video of him, with the Prime Minister. I had pictures and video of him, with the weapon, and the Prime Minister. I had his phone number and his home address. Name: Dean Roxby. Hometown: Langley, BC. Alias: TooTallDean. Interests: Firearms, photography. Political affiliation: Conservative. Address & Phone Number: 604-555-1234. Visuals: Photos with weapons, videos of the weapon and subject firing it. Audio: Narration of video of weapons and gunfire sounds. Sourcing: The information was a big help, too. After talking to him, he quickly made his profile private and removed the videos. But I still had them on my hard drive.

This effort was well worth the time. The information I found allowed for a fuller picture of the event. As it was a fundraiser BBQ, I also checked to see if he had made any political donations to a federal party using the elections Canada database. At the end of the day I had found two videos of a man with this weapon. Using the name from the videos, I found links to his hobbies that led to finding his real name. I had pictures and video of him, with the weapon, and the Prime Minister. I had his phone number and his home address. Name: Dean Roxby. Hometown: Langley, BC. Alias: TooTallDean. Interests: Firearms, photography. Political affiliation: Conservative. Address & Phone Number: 604-555-1234. Visuals: Photos with weapons, videos of the weapon and subject firing it. Audio: Narration of video of weapons and gunfire sounds. Sourcing: The information was a big help, too. After talking to him, he quickly made his profile private and removed the videos. But I still had them on my hard drive.

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**Ethics**

**Fumbling toward open ethics**

Central to the distinction between closed and open ethics is who has the power to control and shape the discourse.

Stephen J. A. Ward

The shape of a future journalism ethics is slowly emerging from the shadow of the once dominant professional ethics that was closed to meaningful participation by citizens.

Journalism ethics is fumbling toward what I call an “open journalism ethics.” The advent of new media is making citizens and non-professional journalists intrinsic parts of a global ethics discourse. Whatever the content of a future journalism ethics will be, ethics practice – the way that ethics is discussed, monitored and enforced – will have the characteristics of an open ethics.

Consider an example of this open public sphere for ethics. When columnist Jan Moir for London’s Daily Mail wrote a homophobic column about the death of Boyzone singer Stephen Gately the column sparked a campaign on Twitter and Facebook, resulting in 22,000 complaints to the UK’s Press Complaints Commission (PCC) in a single weekend.

In open ethics, both professional and non-professional journalists participate in the evaluation of practice and principles. Open ethics is a citizen-based discourse that runs along the sinews of overlapping communication networks. The ethics discourse is no longer orderly, no longer anarchic. It is also more inclusive, less hierarchical, more transparent, and global.

**Closed and open ethics**

Central to the distinction between closed and open ethics is who has the power to control and shape the discourse. An ethics discourse is closed to the extent that it places significant restrictions on two things: (1) the “intended users” of the standards and principles, and (2) who gets to participate in the on-going discourse about the standards and principles. A closed ethics is a set of standards for the guidance of a small number of intended users – members of a relatively small group of practitioners. In contrast, an open ethics sees the standards as providing guidance beyond the group – potentially to all of society.

A closed ethics restricts who participates in two ways – who gets to participate in the discussion, and who participates in decisions based on that discussion. For example, in the Canadian Association of Journalists, non-professional members of a practice were not allowed to vote on final recommendations.

An open ethics does not consider the boundary between the professional and non-professional members of a practice to be absolute. To the contrary, it regards the meaningful participation of non-members in ethics discourse to be necessary and important.

**Journalism ethics as closed**

Historically, the great wave of professionalism in the 18th and 19th centuries was aimed primarily for the guidance of a small but clearly defined group of intended users – professional journalists working for large newspapers and broadcasters. Norms such as objectivity and independence have been a point of contention between journalists and external influences. Journalists would self-regulate their practice.

Not surprisingly, then, most journalism ethics discourse over the years has been “in-house” – occurring in ethics journals aimed at journalists, or debated at conferences. While journalism ethics discourse over the years has been in-house, and into this new century, there has been a trend to make journalism and its ethics more open. First there were press councils and ombudsmen. Then there was much talk of “accountability mechanisms” and editorial transparency. By the late 1990s interactive forms of media allowed newsrooms to start asking – incessantly – for audience feedback to programs. Yet all of this amounted to only a gradual extension of public participation in ethics discourse. Many of the mechanisms, such as press councils, were based on a closed model where the public were allowed to register only complaints about specific events. Even newspapers such as The New York Times investigated scandals of fabrication by reporters, the process was firmly in the hands of in-house editors. More recently, major news organizations such as the Washington Post and The Associated Press have developed internal guidelines for social media. The process, typically, has been internal and closed.

**Enter open ethics**

In the late 1990s, this closed approach to journalism ethics began to be undermined by new forms of communication. Citizens can create media, do journalism, use powerful online tools for gathering information and checking news stories, and join networks for discussion. Blogs, social media writers, web site creators and tweeter-stars do not need to be members of professional news organizations to debate ethics; they may question and seek to channel these new expansive voices that care little for principles of good journalism.

**Conclusion**

In summary, here is how this sphere is changing the three features of closed ethics:

**Intended users:** The “democratization of media” blurs the old idea of the intended users of ethics. Not only is it unclear who is a journalist, but journalism ethics now applies to all media citizens. If citizens participate in media, they too must ask what norms they will follow on their wikis and blogs.

**Participation:** Networks of people participate meaningfully in ethics discourse in both ways – discussion and adoption. For example, citizens were polled, monitored and commented on the daily activities of The New York Times, on police and on the public invited to use the online world to collaborate among professional journalists; citizens were told what the standards are.

**Intended users:** The “in-house” model is gradually giving way to an open ethics. At the time of writing, for example, the London-based paper The Guardian had not invited the public to participate in the standards. But the Guardian had not invited the public to participate in the standards.

One form, as seen in the Jan Moir case, is the well-known “us versus them” model of media criticism. A more recent model is collaboration between professional journalists and online tweeters and bloggers.

Take, for example, how The Guardian newspaper worked with the online world to overcome a court ban obtained by Trafigura, a multinational oil company. Trafigura had dumped chemical waste illegally in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, in 2006, leading to tens of thousands of people reporting illnesses ranging from skin lesions to diarrhoea and breathing problems. Trafigura secured a “sweeping injunction” in Britain preventing the media in that country from reporting on the class action by 30,000 Africans and even barring the media from reporting on a question asked on the media.

The Guardian appealed to the blogosphere and twitter-sphere (http://www.guardian.co.uk/abidjan/direct/3/twitter-online-outcry-trafigura-trafigura). Within 12 hours of the editor of The Guardian tweeting about the injunction, it became the most popular trending topic on Twitter in Europe. The parliamentary question was unearthed, published online by bloggers and retweeted on Twitter. Trafigura dropped the ban.

An open ethics does not consider the boundary between the professional and non-professional members of a practice to be absolute. To the contrary, it regards the meaningful participation of non-members in ethics discourse to be necessary and important.

**OPEN ETHICS: A homophonic column by Jan Moir for London’s Daily Mail sparked a huge online reaction, including a Facebook group calling for her resignation. Open ethics makes both professionals and nonprofessionals part of the discussion.**

Stephen J. A. Ward is the director of the Center for Media and Communication Research, the School of Educational Studies, and the School of Journalism at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He is also a visiting scholar at The University of Wisconsin-Madison’s School of Journalism and Mass Communication. SUMMER 2010 MEDIA 36 37
Feeds and Ledes

ALTERNATIVES TO GOOGLE

It has become the mother of all search engines, but there are other options

Mary Gazze

You, and everyone you know probably Google dozens of times a day, no matter what your career. Google is great for general searches, when you need to look up something quickly like a phone number, address or old news story.

But with the Internet being a massive source of un-indexed information, there are plenty of other, more specialized search engines out there that could help journalists uncover more information than you’d get on Google or Yahoo.

Here’s a rundown of some of the best:

**Dogpile.com and Mamma.com**

These are meta-search engines, which work by running your keywords through other search engines like Google, Yahoo, Bing, and Ask.com, and presenting the combined results on one page. Underneath each result, Dogpile will tell you which major engine found the link. These can help you cast a wider net if you’re having trouble with the mainstream search engines.

**Viewzi.com**

The benefit of Viewzi is not so much the contact information for the owner, often including names, phone numbers, and email addresses. Even if the name of the registrant is not available, Allwhois usually lists the contact information for the company hired to maintain or host the website, and you can use that as a starting point.

**Allwhois.com**

I don’t know about you, but I find lots of web pages with zero contact information on them. Sometimes people forget to list it, may not want to be found, or may buy a domain name hoping to masquerade as someone else.

This website, which is used to check availability for people who want to purchase domain names, will give you the video gaps. But if you can’t find what you’re looking for, Blinkx might help.

**Blinkx.com**

This is a meta-search engine like Mamma.com or Dogpile.com, but it is devoted solely to scouring through millions of hours of video on different video sharing websites like YouTube, Google and MySpace. You can also choose a filter that removes all “Not Safe For Work” results to avoid a potentially embarrassing talk with your boss.

**Omegli.com**

One of my favourite ways to find regular people with a particular interest is to scan topic-specific message boards.

**Dogpile.com**

Type in a keyword, and Omegli searches message boards, discussion groups, and online forums, to find relevant boards, and relevant posts showing what people are talking about.

**Omgili.com**

Omgili claims to scan through 100,000 message boards. Use Google.Omgili.com to combine the results from both websites on one page. (Note: This is not endorsed by Google, but works in the same way that many websites embed a Google search bar).

**Icerocket.com and Technorati.com**

When looking for a blog, people often turn to Google Blog Search, which is great, but here’s two more you may want to try if you’re having trouble. Technorati was one of the first blog search engines and still does a good job today. It also maintains a Top 100 blog list. Icerocket also searches blogs, but the tabs at the top help you sort web, news, twitter, and MySpace results. Sort by the “Big Buzz” tab, and you’ll get a real time view of recent blog posts on your topic, and how long ago they were posted.

**Archive.org**

Google cache works for websites that changed a few weeks ago, but when you need to go back to the days of chat rooms and AOL, jump into the Wayback Machine at archive.org. It will give you a snapshot of your chosen website in all its cluttered, pixelated glory from 1996 (if it even existed back then). Once you’re looking at the website’s archived state, you can still click on the links there, which are sometimes still active.

**Legacy.com**

You’re investigating someone you know is a scam artist, but she says she inherited a fortune from her great aunt Gladys. You know aunt Gladys exists, but is she really even dead? Legacy.com will look through obituaries from major newspapers from Canada and the U.S. Records go back as far as 1949.

**Thoora.com**

Twitter search can help you keep an ear to the ground as to what is a popular topic at any given moment, but you can’t really use it as a gauge to measure water cooler chatter, especially when the top-10 trending topics include tween singing sensation Justin Bieber or WhitneyYouDollars. Google Insight (which I mentioned in my last column) can tell you how many times a search term was used within a given time frame. Toronto-based Thoora examines the traffic coming from blogs, Twitter, and mainstream media, and ranks stories according to “Buzz.” The results are presented in a similar way to Digg.com, but while Digg requires a reader to proactively click on a button to vote for a link to be ranked, Thoora uses an algorithm to rank popular stories without relying on votes. It can help you see what stories the online public cares about, and help you choose where to focus your energies for coming up with relevant story ideas for the day. Thoora’s website said that as of March last year, it had indexed 81 million blogs.

I hope you find these niche search engines useful and I’d love to hear about your success stories. For more about search engines in general read [http://searchenginewatch.com/](http://searchenginewatch.com/) and poke around [http://thesearchenginelist.com/](http://thesearchenginelist.com/) to find a long list of other useful sites.

Happy typing. ☺

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The Future of News

Seeking curators
These new skills may lead to new jobs

Simon Doyle

There’s an emerging discipline in journalism known as curation. It’s not as scary as it sounds. This is early, theoretical stuff, but communications experts and bloggers are devoting significant yarn to curation—i.e., journalists as hunters and gatherers for online, public information.

But like the curation that happens in museums and galleries, it’s a little more than that. Curators, traditionally, take original materials, often artifacts, and arrange them neatly in public spaces, provide context, cull unnecessary items, clean them up, and make them fit for public consumption.

So it’s as much about presenting information as it is finding it and making sense of it. There’s a human touch.

You could say that editors and journalists have always curated news releases, reports, interviews, wire copy, and video and audio tape into their newsrooms. But a news curator’s focus isn’t original reporting.

That doesn’t mean they don’t find exclusive stories. There’s a need to swim through the ocean of data to be found on blogs, Twitter, Facebook, discussion groups, emails, databases, Flickr, YouTube, news groups, online communities, crowdsourced data, and other miscellaneous, niche Web content.

Twitter alone is a sea of potential stories. Bitly—that short url people use in their tweets—generated 2.7 billion clicks in February of this year, more than Google News, which last year generated about one billion clicks per month.

Most social media is raw, unedited source material, but has more value when it’s cleaned up, checked for accuracy, and arranged and packaged in a form that consumers want.

“The stuff that comes through citizen journalism channels, for the most part, isn’t journalism,” Michael Tippett, founder of the Vancouver-based NowPublic citizen journalism project, told me recently.

His organization employs five editorial staff, who primarily work as curators. They software in the newsroom, called Scan, that allows them to punch in a location or a keyword and pull up a sea of related citizen-generated photos, videos, and other content.

NowPublic is using the program to tap into “a vast conversation … happening on the Internet on every imaginable topic,” its website says.

This is already happening in the mainstream media. It’s not uncommon for the evening news to use tweets, Facebook photos, YouTube videos and other social media content in its newscasts.

Here’s a little prediction: It may not be long before much of the evening news becomes a kind of “best of the Web.”

“I think you’re going to see this play out nationally, internationally. I think you’re going to see it play out locally,” Tippett says of the trend.

But how is curating so different from editing, you may ask? Aren’t video producers and copy editors curators?

Kind of. Except that “curator” is a term new to journalism and specific to the world of “journalism 2.0,” an expression that essentially means journalism and technology.

In a recent article on Owni, a French social media site based in Paris, Benoît Raphael proposed a structure for the “future newsroom,” containing three groups of journalists: Reporters, who engage in original, exclusive reporting; curators (or “super copy editors”), who cover breaking stories, scour the Web for material, and engage in “link journalism”; and columnists, including bloggers.

In other words, Raphael advocates for a kind separate, curation newsroom.

Jeff Jarvis, popular BuzzMachine blogger, professor at CUNY, and author of the 2009 book What Would Google Do?, has also blogged about its importance.

He says journalists need to learn curation skills in today’s media environment. The old, traditional skills alone—reading, writing, researching, interviewing, editing tape—won’t cut it.

Curators, “super copy editors”—or whatever you want to call them—will have to keep on top of new communications platforms, social networks, and search tools. To be Web literate is an understatement. They will need a range of technical and often specialized skill sets.

A major report released last year by independent media coalition The Media Consortium, titled “The Big Thaw,” noted that today’s journalism landscape is demanding new skills and competencies.

The report suggested that journalists should build skills in “community-building, strategic use of technology, multi-platform agility, greater integrated organizational functions, and an ability to experiment.” They’re the kind of skills, the report duly noted, that “may require counterintuitive ways of working.”

Alice Funke might not consider herself a curator, but that’s essentially what she does. She is the administrator of Pandit’s Guide, a well-read resource for political junkies. Her skills in information technology (IT) led her to create an online database of cross-searchable elections and riding information that has become about the millionth most popular website in the world. Not bad for a four-year-old site about Canadian politics.

For now, Funke may come short of a profitable business model, and she may not be trained in journalism, but she is successful because she’s creative, loves what she’s doing, and possesses a specific set of computer-assisted-reporting skills.

Cenwest News Service recognized that in 2008 when it hired her during the federal election campaign. She conducted computer-assisted reporting for the national bureau’s reporters.

“I’ve obviously assembled some valuable data sets, data that is in the public domain, but really badly organized,” Funke told me recently.

Today’s journalists don’t need certificates in IT—but a little training in database management is helpful.

So is web design, for obvious reasons. Part of the job of curation involves finding innovative and creative ways of presenting and aggregating information.

Curators, “super copy editors”—or whatever you want to call them—will have to keep on top of new communications platforms, social networks, and search tools. To be Web literate is an understatement.

Martin Langeveld, in a piece last year for the Nieman Journalism Lab, wrote that we should start to think about news content “as a cascade, as in a stream running down a rocky glen, always moving, uniting, filling pools here and there, constantly finding new niches to fill.”

A little abstract, sure. But by example, he wondered why news sites continue to run separate articles for rolling or developing stories. Why not just manage wikis that are updated with each new development?

OpenFile, a new, citizen-engagement news site in Toronto, approaches its stories as “files” as opposed to isolated texts or videos. Each story belongs to a broader, linked-in narrative, like a wiki.

It’s just one creative way curators can experiment with news delivery and drive its innovation on our iPads, laptops and wireless devices.

A brave new world, indeed. But thankfully, there will also continue to be a need for good-old video editors and, of course, writers.

Tippett says he thinks there may come a time when our obsession with immediate information fades, and long-format news makes a return.

“You may find there’s slow information movement, in the same way there was a slow food movement, where people are rejecting McFood and are looking for more wholesome food,” he says.

It’s also notable that the online encyclopedia, HowStuffWorks.com, is hiring writers, according to the site. Yes, plain old writers. You might even consider it a form of journalism.

Simon Doyle is the editor of The Wire Report in Ottawa.

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