RJI Futures Lab

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I. Introduction

The Reynolds Journalism Institute (RJI) Futures Lab is an online program geared toward coverage of new media and journalistic practices, developing technology and communication trends. The Futures Lab produces a weekly episode reporting a variety of news and issues, which can include anything from emerging technology to discussions with media professionals about predictions about the future of mobile platforms. The show aims to grow an audience of print and digital newsroom members, strategic communications professionals, technological innovators and anyone with a curiosity for the evolution of media.

The Futures Lab captures this audience with content designed to ask and answer questions about the future of journalism and changing practices in media organizations. Team members work in RJI’s Futures Lab at the University of Missouri School of Journalism with university faculty and members of the RJI Fellowship Program to discuss and produce content as a collaborative newsroom.

Production Cycle

The show’s production cycle operates Monday through Friday, with pitching and preliminary reporting taking place in the beginning of the week and final reporting, video editing and supplemental content generation taking place in the end of the week. Reporters managed a Google account to post story drafts and related content for review.

An episode generally lasts between 8 and 11 minutes and consists of two or three segments produced by reporters varying from 2 to 4 minutes in length. Individual segments feature Skype or Google Hangout interviews, demo material provided by interviewees, screen captures (through SnapzPro software) of online content and video clips of a technology’s use. In-person interviews were conducted less frequently but when used in a segment would be coupled with video exploring, for example, a newsroom or a company’s campus.
Each segment worked on by reporters was comprised of video, Twitter outreach information, segment synopsis for the website, anchor intro, anchor outro and supplementary content related to the segment.

The Futures Lab team met every Tuesday at 8 a.m. to pitch stories, discuss works in progress, set deadlines and have conversations about media trends. Futures Lab Deputy Director Reuben Stern chaired the meeting and would on a case-by-case basis establish times to meet with reporters individually to discuss their work.

Reuben Stern hosted Futures Lab episodes with in-studio filming taking place every Friday. Reporters were usually given a Thursday deadline to allow for edits and suggestions on episode content before the episode was filmed. RJI Technical Director Travis McMillen served as the producer for in-studio filming. Olga Kyle, Futures Lab video editor, completed the production cycle with final edits to video segments and formation of the final episode video.

The student section of the Futures Lab team had five members. Colin Hope, Tatiana Darie, Paige Dornor and Ninh Pham, worked as reporters and Nate Anton worked as the team’s audience development manager. Normally, reporters worked on one or two stories each week. This number would increase following an event or conference attended by Reuben Stern and Olga Kyle, as they would bring back material for reporters to produce two segments each on average. The total time to report and produce a video segment required anywhere from 6 to 10 or more hours of work, entailing research, interviews, interview transcription, video editing and drafting of content related to the video segment.

Nate’s role as audience developer involved devising engagement techniques management of social media accounts, a monthly online analytics report and discussions with audience outreach professionals.
The Futures Lab team contributed segments to a total of 15 episodes produced during the 2014 spring semester.

II. Semester Accomplishments

A. Reporting – Colin Hope
This semester I produced a total of 10 video segments for the Futures Lab Update program ranging in topic from content personalization to new technologies in the newsroom.

1. In-person Interviews: Many of the video segments produced for the weekly episode use materials like website content and interviews done via webcam, so it was important for the show’s variety to do face-to-face reporting as well. This semester I conducted several in-person interviews while reporting for the Futures Lab, including visits to Seattle-area media organizations while on a trip with another journalism class. I also covered the RJI Mobile First conference and interviewed over a dozen attendees to produce a segment about the future of journalism and mobile technology. (See Futures Lab updates #49 & #54.)

2. Themed Episodes: Last semester’s Futures Lab team made themed episodes a regular element of the show. This semester, Reuben Stern discussed with reporters what topics the team could cover for themed episodes. I produced a segment for an episode covering mobile trends (Mobile First) and segments for an episode about new tools enhancing mobility for newsrooms. (See Futures Lab updates #49 & #58.)

B. Audience Development
The Futures Lab experimented with a new position this semester: an audience engagement researcher. The position was designed to allocate additional time and resources to build and engage the Futures Lab’s audience.
The Futures Lab’s intended audience is news leaders and industry professionals. Therefore, we researched engagement strategies and various platforms to best connect with our target audience.

Throughout the semester we had success using social media by growing our Twitter following and developing an appropriate LinkedIn strategy moving forward. However, engagement extends beyond the use of social media, and we’ve compiled a detailed list of recommendations to implement beginning this summer or the fall semester.

1. Social Media

a. Twitter
The Futures Lab experienced several successes with Twitter this semester. One of the first Twitter accomplishments was changing the generic profile background to match the RJI brand. Our Twitter goals at the start of the semester were as follows:

- Tweet 1-2 times daily referring back to the RJI website
- Engage with Tweeps (Twitter users)
- Build following
- Build/add to Twitter lists
- Appropriately Tweet/RT (relevant content from) guests throughout the week the show is published

Referring back to our starting goals as a metric to determine success, we can conclude the following as successes:

- Consistent tweets referring back to the RJI website (1-2 times daily)
- Increased engagement with Tweeps (RTs, favorites, mentions)
- Increased following from 492 to 1,013 (increased by more than 2.5x)
- Organized Twitter lists and created new ones
- Engaged with guests from the weekly updates

Consistent Tweeting
The fast-pace nature of Twitter permits multiple posts of the same content. This semester we set a goal to tweet at least once or twice a day with a link referring back to the Futures Lab website.

There are different strategies to keep in mind when crafting an effective tweet, which are listed in the recommendation section of this report. However, as the graph below depicts, we have leveled out our tweet frequency over the course of the semester.

With the unique [student] turnover rate at the Futures Lab, it's important to establish a practical, yet consistent Twitter strategy year-round. Recommendations going forward are also included in the recommendation section of this report.
**Increased Engagement**

An increased following doesn’t equate increased engagement. It’s imperative to understand what you hope to accomplish with each element of an engagement strategy.

Our goal was to increase our following and engagement on Twitter. Therefore, engagement needs to be measured in terms other than follower count. The best metrics to gauge engagement success on Twitter are the frequency of RTs, mentions and favorites. Yet, quantifying such metrics is only the first part in determining success.

The quality and content of engagement is key. The Futures Lab, as with any organization, is responsible for the controlling/monitoring the type of engagement associated with the brand.

Our Twitter engagement this semester can be broken down into the following categories:

- Engagement with the Futures Lab team
- Engagement by crowdsourcing tips
- Engagement with high profile sources
- Engagement with a broader/more diverse audience
- Engagement through social conversation
Engagement with the Futures Lab team

The Futures Lab engagement strategy extends beyond the Futures Lab itself — it includes the entire Futures Lab team. More people means more engagement possibility.

Futures Lab reporter Tatiana Darie did a nice job of promoting @RJI_FuturesLab throughout the semester.
Futures Lab reporters tweeted during live events and conferences. They also play a role in promoting weekly updates through the proper use of Twitter. A detailed list of recommendations for Twitter is provided in the recommendation section of this report.
Tips: Engagement by Crowdsourcing

Twitter can be an excellent tool of discovery and opportunity. It’s important to be open and accessible to our audience (and potential audience). This semester we were successful at getting responses for story suggestions:

We even started getting unsolicited tips, which signals we’re fostering the desired, engaged community we’ve been working to establish: a community of industry professionals collaborating to advance the future of journalism.
Engagement with high profile sources
@RJI FuturesLab had success engaging with high profile sources such as @CNNWire and @PBSIdeaLab.

Engagement with a broader / more diverse audience
Twitter provides a platform to strategically reach diverse audiences. Engaging with a diverse audience via Twitter reveals the Futures Lab interest and commitment to advancing the field of journalism.
**Engagement through social conversation**

Perhaps one of the most notable benefits of Twitter is simply being available to connect and converse with an intended audience. Platforms such as Twitter enable the trend of news transitioning from a lecture to a conversation.

Twitter is more than a billboard and tweeps want to engage, not passively consume. And that’s why it’s important to be monitoring our engagement actively to respond in a timely manner.

Casual conversation is great way to build rapport, extend influence and interact with our audience. The habit of routine engagement will “train” our audience to interact on a more routine basis. Here are a few highlights of casual engagement:
Increased Following
At the beginning of the semester, the Futures Lab Twitter account (@RJIFuturesLab) had 492 followers and was following 1,051 users. At the close of the semester, @RJIFuturesLab has 1,310 followers and is following 978 users.

The following graph displays a general illustration of our following/follower ratio for the previous three months (twittercounter.com only offers three months worth of analytics for free).

Source: http://twittercounter.com/

Ultimately, we inverted our following/follower ratio and increased our following by 166 percent.
Twitter Lists

Twitter lists are a great way to organize tweeps and monitor activity. This semester we began strategically creating lists to compliment the Futures Lab. Lists have the option of being public or private, and @RJIFuturesLab has a mix between the two at the close of the semester.

List should generally remain private unless our audience can benefit from it in some way. At the close of the semester, we have six public lists — Futures Lab Team, Journalism Educators, Innovative Academics, Innovative Journalists, Innovative Newsrooms and Student Newsrooms. Publicly listing others increases our chances of being listed as well, which is ideal for more frequent engagement/exposure.

In addition to the six public lists, @RJIFuturesLab has several private lists in the works. These private lists include Futures Lab Guests, Resources for Journalists, Wearable Tech, Tech News, Mobile Innovators and Innovative News Leaders.

Further recommendations for managing lists in the future are located in the recommendation section of this report.
Engagement with Show Guests

In today’s digital world, the majority of industry professionals have a Twitter account. This allows us to engage with guests before and after the show. In addition to creating and adding Futures Lab guests to a “Futures Lab Guests” Twitter list, we began engaging with them throughout the week of the show they appeared in.

One technique @RJIFuturesLab got in the habit of was tagging guests in a hashtagged “Follow Friday” (#FF) post. This serves as a simple way of saying thank you while still promoting our episode. We’ve received positive feedback from #FF posts:
b. LinkedIn

Given that the Futures Lab’s intended audience is news leaders and industry professionals, we looked into LinkedIn to see how the professional network could help connect the Futures Lab with our audience.

Early on in the semester, we spoke with Yumi Wilson, LinkedIn’s corporate communications manager for one of our episodes. Wilson explained how LinkedIn can be a valuable tool for journalists as well as her outreach efforts in the journalism community.

RJI already has a presence on LinkedIn, which allows additional options when creating the Futures Lab page. A detailed list of options can be found in the recommendation section of this report.

2. User Experience

Having an engaged audience requires an organization to consciously present content in a clear, easily accessible manner. If we expect our audience to interact with us, we must guide them in a logical, efficient way.

There was another capstone team this semester designated to improve RJI’s website and social platforms. Yet, there is some overlap in our goals to increase audience engagement, making it worth noting.

Even though another capstone team was working on improving the website, we still kept user experience in mind when crafting our engagement strategy. We recommended a short sentence be added to the rjionline.org/futures-lab-update webpage.
The sentence added states: “Each week we bring you a video roundup of fresh ideas, techniques and developments to help spark innovation and change in newsrooms across all media platforms.”

This simple addition clearly states what users can expect when visiting the Futures Lab update page. Any first-time viewer should be aware that we are a weekly show by looking at the landing – this will help build rapport from the get-go.

Further recommendations to improve the quality of user experience are listed in the recommendation section of this report.
III. Preliminary Research

Our preliminary research was twofold. First we took time to familiarize ourselves with the Futures Lab: our goals, competitors, current engagement efforts, workflow, etc. Reviewing the handbooks from previous capstone teams proved beneficial to help us quickly get acquainted to the Futures Lab.

Once we established a clear understanding of the Futures Lab goals, we began diving into preliminary engagement research. Last semester Nate had the opportunity to take former RJI Fellow Joy Mayer’s Participatory Journalism course and work on the Missourian’s Community Outreach team.

Nate’s experience working with Joy, along with her published research on the RJI website, served as the bedrock for our preliminary research. Our preliminary research can be categorized by the following: the role of an engagement strategy, engagement techniques and metrics for success.

A. What is an Engagement Strategy?

Before exploring what makes up an engagement strategy, it’s important to determine why an engagement strategy is even worth pursuing. The rise of digital technology has ushered in waves of innovation and transformation within the media industry. One of the most notable transformations is the role of the audience.

Clay Shirky, an academic studying the effects of the Internet on society, puts participatory culture into context in his book “Cognitive Surplus” by stating:

“The atomization of social life in the twentieth century left us so far removed from participatory culture that when it came back, we needed the phrase “participatory culture” to describe it. Before the twentieth century, we didn’t really have a phrase for participatory culture; in fact, it would have been something of a tautology. A significant chunk of culture was participatory—local gatherings, events, performances—because where else could culture come from?”
Humans are relational beings by nature, and Shirky illustrates the importance of studying human motivation and behavior to better understand and connect with an audience.

An RJI post titled “Engagement lessons from outside journalism” provided more insight into the area of engagement. The post states: “In sum, engagement can be considered a measure of an individual’s cognitive response, personal or emotional connection, and/or actions.”

Therefore, dedicating time and resources (outside the traditional field of journalism) to gain a deeper understanding of such factors can lead to increased engagement.

Aside from aspects of our innate human behavior, it’s important to keep engagement in mind to stay ahead of the curve as the media industry continues to evolve.

As Joy notes in her RJI post, “A resource for newsrooms: Measuring the success of audience engagement efforts,” there’s a reason why prominent industry professionals attended the RJI event, *The Engagement Metric*, back in May 2011. Joy states: “… as news organizations fight for survival, a more connected relationship with communities should be valued, and therefore measured.”
One of Joy’s first posts as an RJI Fellow explores the question: “What does ‘engagement’ really mean?” This is an appropriate question to set as the foundation for our research.

Joy broke engagement down into three broad categories: community outreach, conversation and collaboration.

- **COMMUNITY OUTREACH** -- Outreach includes efforts to share ourselves, our expertise and our content with our community. It involves: Taking the content to the audience, rather than hoping they’ll find us. Identifying information needs, catering our products to meet them and distributing them in a way that makes sense. Being willing to participate in the community as individuals, building connections and personalizing our brand. Inviting the community to get to know our people and our processes. Enriching our community, sharing our own knowledge and supporting other community enrichment efforts.

- **CONVERSATION** -- Being in conversation with our community means listening as well as talking, and adjusting what we do and cover based on what we hear. It involves: Hosting discussions in person and online on topics that matter to the community. Participating in conversations we’re not hosting, both in person and online. Valuing how a continuing dialogue can make us better journalists and improves the journalism. Using web analytics to better understand what people are showing us they value in what we do, and basing at least some of our decisions about content and staff resources based on what we’re seeing. Recognizing that journalism is a process, not just a product, and involving more voices in the process means more diverse journalism.

- **COLLABORATION** -- Collaborating with our communities, the highest form of engagement, means we have a shared investment in and influence over our journalism. It involves: Soliciting and relying on user contributions. Soliciting and using user input about what we should cover and how we should allocate our resources. Valuing the role the users play in reacting to and sharing our content. Recognizing that we can accomplish things with the cooperation of the community that we could not do alone.

Here’s a breakdown of how she describes each:

Engagement encompasses several aspects of the reporting process, but should be extended to become part of the reporting process itself. Another RJI post by Joy demonstrates how this can be done — “What ‘engagement’ means to The Guardian’s Meg Pickard:”
The diagram above clearly reveals areas of untapped potential for engaging with an audience. This prompted us to examine the untapped potential for the Futures Lab.

Before an organization begins to strategize and build an engagement plan, there are three general factors to keep in mind according to Joy’s RJI engagement research:

1. Know what your mission is as a newsroom
2. Understand there’s no one-size-fits-all solution to community engagement
3. Approach each strategy or project with goals

Once we gained a better understanding of what community engagement is and why it’s important, we were able to move forward with strategic planning and experimentation.
In doing so, we followed some of the recommended guidelines from Joy’s research, which is worth quoting in full:

- “Develop a written strategy for the organization’s efforts.
- Start every project with a measurable goal. In 12 months, six months, one week or one day, what would success look like?
- Consider whether your goals align with any other community organization’s goals, and consider partnerships.
- Build capacity within the organization (hire people who know engagement, assign specific duties, train staff, etc.)
- If engagement is a priority, it should be valued in the newsroom. Consider including engagement strategies in the performance evaluation of individual journalists, and of departments. Consider hiring people (perhaps even non-journalists) with different expertise, such as analytics, marketing or research. Embed them in the newsroom, and hold them accountable for newsroom training and culture changes. Consider allocating staff time for audience interaction and understanding, and for thoughtful strategizing, as Google does with its 20 percent innovation time.
- Consider learning from disciplines like marketing, analytics, nonprofits, anthropology, social media, civic activism, etc. Whether you want to launch a community project, learn about your community, increase the community’s investment in your work or change the perception of your brand, there are folks who know more about how to do it than you do.
  - Identify specific communities in which to make inroads. Consider a long-term investment in a specific community (community of interest or geography or socio-economic level or education or any other unifying characteristic), with a goal of addressing that community's needs, or of transitioning individuals from non-participants to collaborators.
- Build community profiles of target communities, like the CIA world fact book reports on different countries.”

B. Engagement Techniques

Any engagement strategy should be unique to each individual organization. While there are numerous techniques available, they can be grouped into the following five general categories:

1. Station partnerships and collaborations
2. Audience commenting online
3. Audience participation in content creation
4. Audience recommending content online
5. The production of station events

We researched examples from various organizations to gauge how each individual technique fits within one of the five categories listed above.
C. Measuring Engagement Success
There’s no one-size-fits-all engagement strategy. Nor is there an all-encompassing practice for measuring success. The first step to properly measuring success is determining which metrics of success to analyze.

Joy conveys this very idea within the title of her RJI post, “Social media metrics: No magic answer, but useful tips.” There is no catchall answer to determine success. It requires a delicate combination of quantitative and qualitative data.

For example, if we were to look at the number of comments as a metric of engagement, we could associate the quantitative data (number of comments) as success if it increases. However, the quality of those comments may not be relevant to the conversation taking place. And this is why a combination of quantitative and qualitative data is needed to determine the greatest successes and avoid misinterpreting the results of our efforts.

While there are various metrics for determining engagement success, an organization can't pinpoint those metrics until an engagement strategy is set in place. Establishing metrics of success to accompany each engagement goal along the way is a good habit to adopt to ensure focus and consistency.

IV. Research Questions
Previous capstone groups working with the Futures Lab conducted research on ways to improve the Futures Lab product and brand as well as its outreach to audience members. Following up on their recommendations, the Futures Lab team had its first audience development manager this semester and the mission of the capstone team concentrated on audience engagement strategy.
The goal of our research this semester was to assess the strategies currently in practice by media organizations, compare recommendations on strategy by media professionals and form recommendations of our own for achieving growth in the Futures Lab audience.

The questions guiding our research aim to discover successful methods of audience engagement and their use in the media industry.

**What types of engagement strategies have been most successful for media organizations?** It is crucial to first determine what strategies media organizations have been using and how effective they are for growing an audience. There is great variation in the different approaches to audience engagement; determining which of these approaches have resulted in improved communication and responsiveness from an audience allows us to find the strengths and weaknesses of the Futures Lab’s strategy.

**How does someone measure a successful engagement strategy?** What are the metrics for success? What tools are available for gauging audience participation, site viewership and popularity of content? We can better track the growth of the Future Lab’s online presence with knowledge of the best ways to measure it.

**Are there any strategies for audience engagement outside the use of digital media?** It is important to keep in mind that members of the Futures Lab audience are not just online profiles - they’re real people that interact with each other outside of cyberspace. Are live events and membership programs used with success by media organizations to extend the relationship between content provider and viewer?

**How does mindfulness of audience engagement influence the final product an organization produces?** Are qualities of a piece of content determined by how that content is shared? Finding the relationship between dissemination and the facets of a piece of content that facilitate that dissemination allows us to make a more palatable and convenient product.
How accessible are media organizations to their audiences outside of the Internet? This question is geared at media organizations developing an audience in their local communities. This can inform us as to how the Futures Lab might use its location to its advantage.

What are effective methods of recovering from a loss in viewership? When analytics show that viewership is down, it could either indicate that there is a temporary lull in activity or that there is a consistent pattern behind loss of interest. What do media organizations do to reassess their approach to an audience?

What is the future of audience engagement? This is a simple but important question to ask. While it is impossible to completely predict the way audience engagement will evolve in coming years, trends in newsroom practices and emerging technologies can shine a light on how things are likely to change and what direction they are going.

V. Case Study Research

We conducted interviews with media industry members to gauge the state of engagement strategies across the country. Participants ranged from members of print newspapers to online publications and broadcast outlets. See the appendix for transcripts of interviews.

Tallahassee Democrat (Tallahassee, Fla.)

We interviewed Rebeccah Lutz, multimedia news editor for the Tallahassee Democrat. We chose the Democrat because of its strong readership and approach to multimedia reporting as a member of Gannett.

Synopsis:
• It's important to employ a variety of techniques for audience outreach instead of a singular approach to social media. Use of live blogs, push alerts and surveys as well as community forums can be valuable for growing an audience.
• The user base of the Democrat decreased in size after it implemented an online meter. To combat this, newsroom staff placed a renewed focus on quality and immediate journalism in combination with training staff on social media reporting.
• Mobile audiences are expected to increase in size in coming years.

**Las Vegas Review-Journal (Las Vegas, Nev.)**
We interviewed Michael Quine, a video producer and videographer for the Las Vegas Review-Journal. We chose the Review-Journal for its history of increasing social media activity.

Synopsis:
• Content is produced with the consumer’s attention span in mind; videos longer than 3 minutes are not typical because a long video can lose the consumer’s attention.
• Reporters will monitor the activity surrounding a video clip to determine if it has the potential to “go viral,” and then note what elements of the video contributed to its popularity.
• Facebook and Twitter are the central focus of the Review-Journal’s social media strategy and plan for audience engagement.

**The Springfield State Journal-Register (Springfield, Ill.)**
We interviewed Jason Piscia, online editor for The State Journal-Register. We chose the Journal-Register for its reporting style and integration of social media with their website homepage.

Synopsis:
• The Journal-Register is rethinking the transfer of print edition material to digital platforms by maximizing different ways to tell a story other than text and photos.
• The newspaper incorporates the digital strategy into its content by featuring links to web content in print articles.
• Newsroom members create quizzes, polls and stories from database materials to generate content when there is a lull in activity on the website.

**Relevant24 (Boston, Mass.)**
We interviewed Ashly Carr, associate writer for Relevant24. We chose Relevant 24 because they are a company specializing in engagement.

Synopsis:
• Relevant24 considers the mere participation of a brand in a topical conversation as a success in itself.
• Relevant24 uses Twitter and Facebook as their primary tools to reach audiences.
• Relevant24 monitors the types of posts that attract the most engagement and build upon that type of post whether it include an image, audio or video.

**Adbusters (Vancouver, Canada)**
We interviewed Kyle Robertson, web director for Adbusters. We chose Adbusters because they are an advocacy organization and aim to evoke reactions from their audience. Also, they managed to ignite Occupy Wall Street, which is a significant, historic engagement accomplishment.

Synopsis:
• For Adbusters, an opt-in email blast has proven to be one of the most effective ways to reach its audience.
• Adbusters mails physical resubscription notices to lapsed subscribers to help maintain and grow readership.
• In addition to Facebook and Twitter, Adbusters has experienced success using StumbleUpon to increase readership.

**Minnesota Public Radio (Minneapolis, Minn.)**
We interviewed Jessica Horwitz, member engagement and communication specialist for Minnesota Public Radio. We chose Minnesota Public Radio because public radio tends to have a relationship with its audience, and we wanted to learn why.

Synopsis:
- MPR defines engagement as “show me you know me.”
- MPR is genuinely interested in learning whom their audience is so that they can better serve them.
- MPR exists to serve its members, and therefore, produces content to meet member needs, preferences and tendencies.

**GeekWire (Seattle, Wash.)**
We interviewed John Cook, co-founder of GeekWire. We chose GeekWire because GeekWire is similar to the Futures Lab in terms of content and is still a growing organization.

Synopsis:
- GeekWire doesn’t have a formal engagement strategy, but relies on finding compelling, interesting content that no other organization is talking about.
- GeekWire hosts a number of community events — four signature events a year along with various smaller events such as a panel discussion with executive in from the tech industry.
- While GeekWire has a social presence on site such as Facebook and Twitter, they have no formal strategy for posting or monitoring analytics.

**DeSmogBlog (Seattle, Wash.)**
We interviewed Steve Horn, a research fellow with DeSmogBlog. We chose DeSmogBlog because it was listed as one of Time’s Top 25 “Best Blogs of 2011.” We wanted to learn how they grew the blog to the scale they’re at and why Time ranked them as they did.
Synopsis:

- DeSmogBlog experiments with most traditional engagement efforts including social media management, but they also experiment with different techniques.
- DeSmogBlog is more open about sharing information and content to reach a broader audience — open to the extent they pitch story ideas to other reporters working independently or for another media outlet.
- DeSmogBlog considers a social or policy change a metric of success.

VI. Recommendations

1. Twitter Engagement

Based on the success we had with Twitter this semester, we recommend upcoming Futures Lab teams continue to build upon the following:

A. Tweet consistently and engage frequently.
   - Twitter should be managed year-round and portray consistent tweeting habits — habits that include frequent engagement by favoriting, retweeting, mentioning, crowdsourcing tips, asking questions and inviting feedback. Fostering routine habits helps “train” our audience to engage more frequently in the desired way. We recommend the Futures Lab either hire or designate a person to manage social media during academic breaks when the Futures Lab team has less human resources available.

B. Engage with members of the Futures Lab team on a routine basis.
   - Twitter should become more of a requirement for Futures Lab reporters. Basic knowledge of the platform and a public Twitter account should be taken into consideration when selecting future team members. The Futures Lab team should be engaging with @RJIFuturesLab on a weekly basis. Engagement can include promotion of weekly updates, insights into the reporting process, relevant coverage of live events, crowdsourcing tips, etc.
C. Continue to engage with Futures Lab guests.
   • A large portion of our engagement success can be attributed to engaging with weekly guests. The Futures Lab should continue engaging with guests. Possible opportunities for engagement include the following: include guest Twitter handles in lower third of video, tag guests in #FollowFriday (#FF) posts, tag guest in “evergreen” #ThrowBackThursday (#TBT) posts, tweet quotes from the show that can be attributed (mentioned) to guests, continue adding guests to the “Futures Lab Guests” Twitter list, retweet/share relevant content from guests, ensure guests are acknowledge when they engage with @RJIFuturesLab.

D. Continue building upon both public and private lists.
   • Continue building the appropriate list. Make private lists public if there’s value to be gained by sharing it. Public lists should have 10 or so + active members.

E. Tweet more images.
   • Tweeting images will help tweets stand out in Twitter feeds and generate more shares. Strategies for tweeting more images include the following: tweet screenshots of the weekly update when promoting the show, generate pullout quote graphics from the Futures Lab guests, create generic Futures Lab update images that can be reused or easily manipulated (to add episode #), retweet more content with images.

2. Establish Futures Lab presence on LinkedIn

RJI already has a presence on LinkedIn, but we recommend the Futures Lab be added as a “Showcase Page.” A showcase page is most appropriate for the Futures Lab as LinkedIn describes:

“Companies have unique aspects of their business with their own message to share, and a unique audience to share with. Showcase Pages allow you to extend your Company Page presence by creating a dedicated child page for those aspects of your business. Interested members can then follow your Showcase Page as they follow any Company Page.”

Fast Company provides an example of a LinkedIn company page with showcase pages as pictured below.
Above is a screenshot of the company page.
An administrator on the RJI company page needs to set up the showcase page. Easy-to-follow directions can be found here:

Prior to setting up the showcase page, LinkedIn requires the following:

Once the Futures Lab establishes a showcase page, LinkedIn offers the following marketing advice to grow the page:

**Specifications for Showcase Page Elements**

What are the specifications for elements of a Showcase Page?

**Showcase Page element specifications:**
- **Hero Image:** Minimum 974 x 330 pixels. PNG, JPEG, or GIF. Maximum file size 2 MB. You can crop your image once it's uploaded.
- **Logo:** 100 x 80 pixels. Image will be resized to fit.
- **Square logo:** 50 x 50 pixels. Image will be resized to fit.

**Daily Checklist:**
- Post Company Updates to engage with your followers and target audience.
- Invite new customers and business contacts to follow your Company Page.

**Weekly Checklist:**
- Visit your Company Page analytics tab to see how your page is performing. Look for indicators of what is resonating and driving engagement.
- See an update that has high engagement? Use Sponsored Updates to promote it beyond your follower base.
- Visit LinkedIn Groups relevant to your industry and look for trending topics and discussions - this will provide ideas on what you can post as Company Updates.

**Monthly Checklist:**
- Prompt new employees to link their LinkedIn profiles to your Company Page.
- Review and update your Company Page with fresh imagery and information about your company.
3. Humanize the Futures Lab team and encourage collaborative engagement

If the Futures Lab wants to foster a more participatory culture, it must start by internally fostering a participatory culture. There could be value in designating a single person to an engagement role, but that shouldn’t prevent the entire team from engagement efforts.

Every Futures Lab team reporter should be a social reporter as well. Each reporter should be responsible for drafting 2-3 tweets per story produced and schedule them accordingly throughout the week via HootSuite or TweetDeck. Reporters should be trained on proper Twitter use for the @RJIFuturesLab account to ensure accuracy and consistency. When reporters schedule tweets they can take a moment to engage with those who’ve mentioned @RJIFuturesLab and scan our Twitter lists to RT or share any relevant content.

To implement this strategy going forward, we recommend the Futures Lab experiment with setting Twitter requirements for reporters. We recommend the following requirements to start:

- 2-3 scheduled [@RJIFuturesLab] tweets per story produced
- 1-2 tweets a week from the reporters’ personal Twitter mentioning @RJIFuturesLab (crowdsourcing tips, live tweeting events, insights into the reporting process, etc.)
- 1-2 engagement tweets from @RJIFuturesLab per week (retweets, shout outs, #FF, #TBT, shared content, evergreen stories, etc.)

Collaborative efforts of the team should reflect the Futures Lab’s engagement strategy as it continues to develop.

To make Futures Lab reporters more social, a designated “Meet the Team” page should be created and updated each semester to be displayed on the Futures Lab website. The “Meet the Team” page should display a brief bio for each member of the team, identify the role of each member, and provide contact info such as email and social profile links.
Depending on the capabilities of the website, it would be ideal to have the reporters’ photos and links displayed on each story produced.

4. Tailor the Futures Lab engagement position.
While establishing an engagement position for the Futures Lab offered success this semester, a more narrowly tailored position should be defined going forward.

The dynamic of our capstone team felt off balance and inconsistent. Colin’s focus was primarily reporting and Nate’s focus was audience engagement. Ideally the reporting process should be a social one, and the transformation to get there is the obstacle.

Addressing this obstacle, we recommend the Futures Lab identify and set specific engagement goals and bring on the proper people to help meet those goals. For example, to help the Futures Lab team become more participatory as a whole, bring on someone who can help train reporters and draft an engagement plan to meet this specific need.

Once a participatory culture is set in place, there are alternative engagement roles that could be pursued. An engagement position designated to research the behavioral or cognitive role in engagement provide two more examples of a more narrowly tailored position.

Given the unique nature of the Futures Lab team with its high turnover rate, it would beneficial to clearly state the desired outcome associated with each engagement position through time.

5. Reporting
There is potential to improve the reporting process for capstone students working for the Futures Lab team in the future. Reporters could be more integrated into the audience engagement strategy and contribute to discussions about the Futures Lab’s web
analytics. Altering the variety of produced content, selecting a specialization for future reporting and participating more with the production side of the weekly episode are all ways to make working with for the Futures Lab a more comprehensive and complex experience.

A. Diversification of content

- The majority of the work done by Futures Lab reporters consists of producing a video segment for the weekly episode. More can be done to create variety in content that represents the Futures Lab brand. In addition to video segments posted to YouTube, reporters could an additional form of content each week. This could be anything from a Storify article covering dialogues about social media innovations to a Tiki Toki timeline illustrating the progress of competing emergent technologies. Reporters could draft a weekly blog post on Wordpress or Blogger about the articles they read about new practices in newsrooms. This would assure that reporters are active on multiple platforms and practice versatility in composition styles.

B. Specialization or area of interest

- Futures Lab reporters could be encouraged to adopt an area of interest at the beginning of the semester to guide them on the subjects they report on. A student interested in interactive design could focus a portion of his total stories on topics relating to interactivity. This means that the final work of reporters could have a narrative arc spanning the semester and all the related stories could be bundled as a story package. Having a specific area of interest to report on may also make the process of pitching stories easier as well.

C. Participating with episode production

- Futures Lab reporters work with Reuben Stern and Olga Kyle to polish their video drafts, but there is no established time when reporters are expected to sit down with faculty and be trained in the editing style for Futures Lab episodes. In future, reporters could glean a wider perspective of the complete production cycle by
being present in the studio during filming or watching how the video editor compiles the final product.

6. General
We brainstormed a lot of engagement ideas this semester as we prioritized our efforts. Here’s a bulleted list of ideas we’ve compiled for upcoming Futures Lab teams to consider:

• Plan for special events in advance for marketing purposes
• Offer innovator(s) of the month/year award
• Offer contests
• Celebrate/create special weeks such as social media week, innovation awareness week, etc.
• Offer live presentations for journalism FIGS, 2150 classes, ONA events, Emerging Technologies class, etc.
• Co-host relevant RJI events
• Twitter Chats
• Set up a (private) Pinterest for “evergreen stories” and to organize show content

VII. Appendix (Transcripts)

Rebeccah Lutz
Multimedia News Editor
Tallahassee Democrat (Tallahassee, Fla.)

What types of engagement strategies have proven most effective for your organization?
We use a variety of audience engagement strategies including social media, video (on-demand and live streaming), blogs and live blogs, push alerts, surveys and polls. We also use community events such as forums, coffee meet-ups and other face-to-face interaction. A mix of strategies is most effective. Audience engagement requires a two-way, authentic relationship, and it requires a deep knowledge of your audience. We’ve done market research to help us gauge the topics our audiences are most interested in, and we seek to engage them around those topics.

What are your metrics for success when it comes to engagement strategy?
We use a variety of metrics and measurements. We have web-based software that allows us to track our digital reach (number of visitors, recirculation, engagement), and
we use metrics to track our engagement on social media (number of likes, comments, shares, Retweets, etc.). We also have hosted several community events, and attendance at those events, of course, is one way of gauging success.

**What non-digital engagement strategies have been most successful?**
Face-to-face communication. We encourage our journalists who have expertise on certain topics to engage with the public around those topics. We host forums – live and virtual – and encourage our journalists to participate in community events. I, for example, just moderated a public forum about Alzheimer’s disease and dementia. In my volunteer time, I serve as president of the board of directors for a local nonprofit, Alzheimer’s Project. I also have firsthand experience because my dad had Alzheimer’s disease and my mother was his full-time caregiver. I have expertise in this area that I can use to engage a specific audience. Being active in the community also shows our audience members that we are genuine in our relationship with them.

**To what degree does your audience influence the work that you produce or the way you display it?**
Our audience greatly influences our work, but we don’t simply pander to what we know will get the most views online. I, for example, know we’d get a lot of page views if I sent someone to our coast to shoot “bikini photos,” but we’re not going to do that. We seek to produce meaningful journalism across platforms. We still consider the social value of our content and seek to engage audiences in meaningful ways that contribute to the overall good of our community. We also still give caution to issues like conflict of interest. My underlining point here is that, yes, we monitor metrics and other indicators, but they are only part of what we consider in determining what we cover and how we cover it.

**To what extent are you approachable by audience members outside the Internet?**
We’re very approachable, but I’m sure we can always do better. We’re a local news agency in a small city. Some of our journalists have been here for decades. Their community connections run deep. People call us. They approach us in the community. I can’t go anywhere in Tallahassee without someone approaching me to ask a question or give feedback about our content.

**Has your audience ever contracted, and what was your strategy to recover from a diminished user base?**
We were one of the first sites within Gannett Co. Inc. to implement an online meter. That did diminish our user base, and we knew it would. Our approach was to focus on high-quality journalism, including breaking news and watchdog. Quality and immediacy become even more important when you’re asking your audience to pay for something that they previously got for free. We’re also using social media. We’re receiving an increasing number of page referrals from Facebook and Twitter, primarily. We also trained our entire newsroom – every reporter, photographer, and editor – on how to shoot and edit video. We are currently in the process of giving everyone training on digital media metrics. We’re always looking for ways to improve what we do and meet our audiences’ needs across platforms.

**What audience engagement trends do you anticipate in one year - or five years - from now?**
Mobile continues to be a larger part of what we do. We just launched new online, mobile and tablet platforms, and I expect mobile audience share to continue to increase. We’re
also seeing large growth in our video audience. Social media will continue to be important, and despite these changes and advances in technology, our audience still appreciates and values face-to-face community engagement.

Michael Quine
Videographer, Video Producer
Las Vegas Review-Journal (Las Vegas, Nev.)

What types of engagement strategies have proven most effective for your organization?
As far as targeting the audience goes, unfortunately the average user’s attention span is not too terribly long. You cannot put up a 10, 15 or 20-minute piece. It just won’t fly. So the objective is to get to the heart of the story as quickly as possible and try to deliver the content. You want to hook your viewer within the first 30 seconds. Because after the first 30 seconds is where the initial drop off seems to occur. If you can keep your piece to 2-3 minutes and keep it interesting, keep it moving, you can engage the user and keep them watching. We’ve gone longer on some pieces; we’ve had pieces up to 10 to 12 minutes and that’s pushing it at that point. If you can keep the piece flowing where they are engaged you can usually hold on to them. One of the other things we’re doing is distributing our videos not only on the website but also through social media. If I’m doing something that I’m pretty pleased with I’ll put it on my Facebook page and share it there. We also have a YouTube channel that we upload and post some of our videos to as well.

What are your metrics for success when it comes to engagement strategy?
Unfortunately, our metrics are not what I would hope them to be. But we do know when the server starts to tank if we find, for example that Drudge Report has picked it up or it’s gone viral, we can definitely feel the pull, the suction of the website. And that’s usually a really good indicator that something’s going to happen. Recently I’d take a segment where we’d have Harry Reid and that was when he dropped his “domestic terrorist” bombshell. So I put that piece up and it went through the roof. Fox picked it up and it was shooting all over the place. Another one of our videographers put out a piece a couple years back about a house that floated down the river in Nevada when there was flooding. And that was another one that went through the roof. We’ve had a fair amount of those happen because in Nevada we have a lot of crazy things going on. Sometimes those will get picked up. Drudge Report is usually one of our biggest indicators that we have gone viral with something. We currently use Google Analytics but I’m not getting the type of analytics I’m hoping to get. Our IT department is working on improving the capabilities of that because I know that it’s possible to find out and actually get analytics on how long people are watching, where they are coming from and going to. Currently the analytics will only tell us what is happening on that page.

What non-digital engagement strategies have been most successful?
Well, we use our traditional media because we are a newspaper. In many cases I’d say we will publish – if there’s a feature piece, for example – a URL or shortcut URL the project or the video itself. We’ve had success with that. People will read the article in the paper and then forward on over to it.

**What social media tools have been most useful to engage with the audience?**
I think Facebook has been very helpful because there are so many people on it right now. And not only can I promote it but we also have a Review-Journal Facebook page. If I’m involved with a reporter, he might put it on his page and the thing starts spreading out through the different people who have posted it, and their friends, and so on. It can get passed around quite a bit. I think that has been one of the most useful and successful. We have some stuff on YouTube and we’ve had other people pick up on it and embed [the content] on their sites as well.

**To what degree does your audience influence the work that you produce or the way you display it?**
It doesn’t influence the content, per se. The content is what it is: we find the stories and we produce them. I think we try to tailor [presentation] to keep the viewer engaged. Sometimes you have to cut your content to get the idea across. There are other times when there’s a lot of back information you can use; sometimes people will recap what they’ve said and I’ll use that recap as opposed to a ten-minute dissertation on what they’re trying to say. They’ll come back and say it more concisely. There’s an ethical thing there, too. You want to make sure you keep it ethical and don’t modify the message with anybody. With editing, you can do anything. You can say something completely opposite with the way you edit using their own words. It’s important that the core message is still delivered as intended by the one who said it.

**To what extent are you approachable by audience members outside the Internet?**
We do have a comments section on the website so people can comment there. The videographer or photographer’s name is usually below the video or photo and that is a direct link to e-mail. We’re accessible through e-mail and we’ve had people call and say that they’ve found certain videos. Maybe we cover a sports story at a high school and they want to get a copy of it and they’ll track us down either by calling the R.J. or by e-mail. That’s the only way I can think of that people can contact us.

**Has your audience ever contracted, and what was your strategy to recover from a diminished user base?**
I don’t know if we’ve ever had it diminish. Basically, things have just been growing constantly. When I first started doing it, YouTube was just a blip. And now video seems to rule. It’s been pretty much growing constantly. If someone was to lose viewership I think the best way to [recover] would be to take a look at their content, what you’re delivering, the method you’re using to deliver it, how they’re cutting it – and also to look into trying to distribute it through any social media venue that they can.

**What audience engagement trends do you anticipate in one year - or five years - from now?**
It’s ever changing, and when you think it might be something, it could be something completely different. I know that mobile has been probably the largest change to hit us in some time; it’s one of the main inventions of the past two centuries. People are mobile and people want to get the information they need on that mobile device. There are a lot people doing their own reporting out there. The trend that I’m most worried
about is that you have this journalist here to cover, report and write on the news, but a lot of people are getting their news from “Joe Blow” out there who just happens to have a blog and he’s throwing out his opinions with possibly no ethical structure behind what he’s doing and aggregating information from other sources. What I’m really worried about is that we’re going to lose the quality reporting that has been a standard for the way that news is delivered. If that happens – it will happen – but I’m hoping we’re still able to maintain proper news reporting and journalists.

Jason Piscia
Online Editor
The State Journal-Register (Springfield, Ill.)

What types of engagement strategies have proven most effective for your organization?
Social media is first and foremost. We’re in a day and age when people are bombarded with many options for getting information. We’ve found getting our content directly on those platforms for social media it’s been successful for us in getting new viewers to pay attention to what we’re doing. We do the best we can that when we post something on the Web we make sure it’s optimized for mobile because a growing amount of the audience is going there as opposed to desktop computers or any other source. Just so we make sure the stories we’re doing, databases we’re putting together, photo galleries, videos, all work on mobile. It’s important to keep mobile in mind because it’s where all your viewers migrate as well. I think that some newspapers can fall into a trap, especially with veteran staff, of writing a 20-inch story, taking a few photos and putting that in the paper and [thinking] “that will be good.” We always try to help out the staff to branch out and find new ways to tell their stories through video or social media or some other form of database. [Looking for] another way to tell the story other than just text and pictures.

What are your metrics for success when it comes to engagement strategy?
We look at the social media figures like Likes on our Facebook page or followers on Twitter. We keep track of how that grows and what causes it to grow and what might be causing people to step back as well and unfollow us or unfriend us on Facebook. We also keep an eye on the referral traffic as well. How much traffic are we getting on our website directly from people who are coming from social media. Three or four years ago, Facebook was the way to go. But with the changes Facebook has put into place where every post you put on your page doesn’t necessarily feed into all of your people who like your page. It’s made Facebook a little less effective these days. So we’re
finding our greatest growth – percentage growth year after year – of people getting to our page is from Twitter. It’s still only a fraction of what we get from Facebook but growth is happening on Twitter. Over the past couple of years, page views coming from people who saw us on Facebook has been pretty much flat. But I looked the other day and saw we had [about] a 170 percent increase from 2012 to 2013 from Twitter-related referral traffic. Everyone [in the newsroom] got a Twitter and started tweeting their Likes and that contributed to our growth.

What non-digital engagement strategies have been most successful?
We do work with the print side quite a bit to remind readers that there are extra things that you can find online. This can be in the form of little blurbs we put in the middle of stories. We encourage our reporters to use links in their stories in the print version as well to get people to the supplemental content on our website. Print still reaches more people on a daily basis than our website. So that’s still our best way to promote what we’re doing. We have reporters and editors who will go to radio stations sometimes and talk about what’s going on at the newspaper. We obviously put in a plug for the website along the way as well. We have conference rooms where we regularly meet with members of the public, newsmakers and people who are concerned about things.

What social media tools have been most useful to engage with the audience?
Facebook and Twitter are the main sites that we use. They are the most popular sites and that’s where people are. We tried Google Plus for a while and we also tried Pinterest as well but those don’t have a critical mass of our audience on those to make it worth investing time posting things on there. We do once in a while but we focused all of our efforts for social media on Facebook and Twitter just because that’s where the audience is. There’s a new social media tool coming out every month, it seems, and before we jump on it and create a newspaper account for it, we step back and see if it’s going to stand more than the test of time. We’ll see if it’s going to replace the big audience we have on the other two [social media sites]. We look at the return on investment situation for almost everything we do. We have a built-in audience there that’s been built over many years. We’ve had a Facebook page for six or seven years and Twitter maybe longer. As those numbers have built, we value that audience and the ability to connect directly with people. That’s where we place our time. Mainly to get the visitor numbers.

To what degree does your audience influence the work that you produce or the way you display it?
Through Facebook insights and other things we can see gender, age and the time people are interacting with the site. We don’t go as far as to say “Seventy percent of women Liked this post, so we should write more like it.” We don’t go that far; we don’t have those conversations. In terms of decisions on coverage, at this point our social media audience doesn’t play into it. We are still pretty traditional in that sense. When it comes to how we promote a story online or where stories go in a certain month on the website, I will use that information. If I know that they like engaging with the website at 8 a.m., I’ll make sure there’s something there worth clicking on for them.

Has your audience ever contracted, and what was your strategy to recover from a diminished user base?
It depends on the time of year or whatever’s going on, but traffic can get stagnant on the website. It’s safe to say we may in one of those times now. It’s spring and all the crazy
winter weather is over and we haven’t had any crazy spring weather yet. We’re in Springfield, Illinois, and the legislature is in session but they’re not doing anything too heavy at the moment. So, traffic is fair; there’s no huge spike in activity. When that does happen, we put our heads together to find out what we can do to spark things. We look for ways readers can engage, whether it’s by sending us pictures and stories or getting them to participate in the process somehow. If they’re taking a quiz or a poll, that doesn’t cause traffic to go through the roof but it does keep people engaged on the website and participating and sticking around for more than just a minute and a half to check the headlines on the homepage. We’re looking for ways to people sit around and just graze on our website. We have pretty extensive database collection as well, where we publish salaries of public employees and crime statistics and other information like that. We’ll put our heads together and find more things we can do in that area, too. So a person can sit around and click around our website all day and get all the information they want. Those sorts of things help with getting out of the doldrums of the boring traffic times.

**What audience engagement trends do you anticipate in one year - or five years - from now?**

Most our time has been on Facebook and Twitter, but I think in the future something else will develop. I’m not sure what it is – another site, another method – but something that will become as popular as those two. Google Plus has tried, Pinterest has tried, and they both have their niches but they haven’t really worked well for new. I’d be interested in what’s going to be the next top thing – what’s going to be the app on their phone they use just as much as they use Facebook now to connect with what’s going on in the world and how we can be a part of that. So I’ve been keeping my eye out for the past five years but I haven’t seen anything good yet. Something will supplant Facebook at some point; I can’t see Facebook being as popular as it is forever. There’s been nothing made specifically for news organizations. Facebook does a good job but there’s so much other stuff out there as well.

**What are your metrics for success when it comes to engagement strategy?**

At Relevant24, we’re all about inserting ourselves into cultural conversations. While engagement (likes, shares, comments, retweets, etc.) are great ways to measure success, we view the mere participation of a brand in a topical conversation as a success in itself.

**What social media tools have been most useful to engage with audiences?**

We primarily use Twitter and Facebook to engage with audiences because that’s where the bulk of the people are. On Facebook, it’s more of the audience engaging with the
posts, but for Twitter, the brands we support are more likely to have a back-and-forth conversation with the audience.

To what degree does your audience influence the work you produce?
The audience plays a big part in influencing the type of work we produce. Brands see what types of content/posts audiences are more prone to engage with and they tend to use that type of voice and/or type of post (image, video, etc.).

To what extent are you approachable by audience members outside the Internet?
Being not a brand, but an creative agency, we don’t usually deal directly with audiences unless they are interested in becoming a client.

How do you think audience engagement be different in one year, or five years, from now?
I think in the future we will have more real-time conversation between audiences and brands - be it through social media as we see it now, or in a future form. Since the introduction of social media, social conversation has changed the way brands and companies run, act and respond to a variety of scenarios and I don't see that changing - but increasing.

Kyle Robertson
Web Director
Adbusters (Vancouver, Canada)

What types of engagement strategies have proven most effective for your organization?
Email blasts to our opt-in list works best for us.

What are your metrics for success when it comes to engagement strategy?
As a magazine, subscription (and resubscription) rates are our primary indicator, but for one-off campaigns we use social media analytics.

What non-digital engagement strategies have been most successful?
We mail physical resubscription notices to lapsed subscribers.

What social media tools have been most useful to engage with audiences?
StumbleUpon, Twitter and Facebook.

To what degree does your audience influence the work you produce?
We've published quite a few reader submissions in the past few issues. We wouldn't be around if it weren't for our readers, but the majority of the content is directed by our editor-in-chief, Kalle Lasn.

To what extent are you approachable by audience members outside the Internet?
Every few weeks someone will stop by our office in Vancouver to say hello and get a little tour of our tiny office. We also have high school classes come by once or twice a year, and get a couple snail mail letters every day. Most other interaction happens online.

**Has your audience ever contracted, and what was your strategy to recover from a diminished user base?**
The print industry was really hit around 2008, and we lost quite a chunk of our subscriber base around that time. We’ve raised our prices and been more selective about where we distribute the magazine since then.

**How do you think audience engagement be different in one year, or five years, from now?**
We take it one year at a time -- very hard to say where we'll be in five years, but things are looking good for the next one!

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Jessica Horwitz  
Member Engagement & Communication Specialist  
Minnesota Public Radio (Minneapolis, Minn.)

**What types of engagement strategies have proven most effective for your organization?**

For Membership, our most effective engagement strategies have been online and in person.

By engaging our online audience, we learn more about them, their preferences and how we can better serve them. We send an email newsletter twice each month, plus additional emails promoting events, new initiatives or special offers. These are curated for our core audience.

Because of the information we know about them (their zip codes, listening preferences, etc.) we’re able to target the messages and get the right content in front of the right people.

When engaging the audience at in-person events, it’s a valuable opportunity to get to know them better. Are they Members? What do they listen to? Do we have their email address in our records? How can we better serve them?

**What are your metrics for success when it comes to engagement strategy?**

A successful engagement campaign has to include some sort of audience participation. Did they answer our question? Did they retweet us or use our hashtag? Did they enter our giveaway?
When asked, did they make a donation?

**What non-digital engagement strategies have been most successful?**

MPR has a large presence at the Minnesota State Fair every year. At our booth, we’re able to engage with thousands of Members and listeners. On a single day, we gave away 1500 water bottles to MPR Members, simply because we asked them to show their Member cards at the booth.

**What social media tools have been most useful to engage with audiences?**

Our organization uses an enterprise social media system. We’re able to monitor several accounts and see interactions with the audience. Based on our experience, plus research on best practices, we’ve found that concise messages with links work best on Twitter and image-based messaging work best on Facebook and Instagram.

**To what degree does your audience influence the work you produce?**

For Membership, we exist to serve Members. Our work is based on their needs, preferences and tendencies. Based on their feedback and reactions, we’ve adjusted campaigns to better meet our goals.

**To what extent are you approachable by audience members outside the Internet?**

Listeners can call our 800 number, take a tour of our studios, and attend our events around the region. MPR has a presence at many major events in Minnesota, including the Minnesota State Fair.

**Has your audience ever contracted, and what was your strategy to recover from a diminished user base?**

We know that a portion of our listeners is abandoning their radios for online streams and on-demand listening platforms like Pandora or Stitcher. As a result, our content departments have allocated staff and resources to make our content available in the digital space. Through that, we’ve found new audiences as well. We continue to hear from Members and listeners who don’t live in Minnesota, or even the U.S., yet they listen and give to MPR.

**What audience engagement trends do you anticipate in one year, or five years, from now?**

More and more content will be consumed on-demand, rather than through a broadcast or online stream. We have to tailor our engagement campaigns to reach audiences where they are, when they want it. A trend I see in the future is user-submitted content, whether it’s video, audio, text or images.

Another trend is less email, and more via SMS and social media. This better suits the new generation of public media consumers.
John Cook  
Co-founder  
GeekWire (Seattle, Wash.)

What types of engagement strategies have proven most effective for your organization?  
Find compelling, interesting information that no one is talking about yet.

What are your metrics for success when it comes to engagement strategy?  
No formal metrics.

What non-digital engagement strategies have been most successful?  
Just traditional shoe-leather reporting.

What social media tools have been most useful to engage with audiences?  
We use a lot of different channels to communicate and reach out to our community — podcast, Facebook, Twitter and Google+ to a lesser extent. We do contests and ask questions.

To what degree does your audience influence the work you produce?  
We don’t measure that per say, but it does. Nothing that’s really formalized, but we pay attention to which stories are of interest and try to produce more like that. Readers can submit tips to us or leave comments. Occasionally we will ask for help via Facebook or Twitter asking for information, but we don’t have a formal process.

To what extent are you approachable by audience members outside the Internet?  
We do four large signature events a year as well as smaller events throughout the year. We host fireside chats and panels where we interview execs in the tech industry. It allows people to meet one another, network and have a good time.

Has your audience ever contracted, and what was your strategy to recover from a diminished user base?  
We have not really experienced this problem.

How do you think audience engagement be different in one year, or five years, from now?  
We will continue to see people be more involved with the content being produced, but I’m not sure to what extent. We will continue to see new ways that people are participating to create content — how it’s produced, how it’s shared and how people feel about it.
Steve Horn
Research Fellow
DeSmogBlog (Seattle, Wash.)

What types of engagement strategies have proven most effective for your organization?
Because it’s an online publication, our main routes are basically social media — Facebook, Twitter, Reddit. Mainly Twitter and Facebook in addition to email lists. We send out a weekly or biweekly newsletter depending on how much content we produce.

We have this new thing where we create a Skype group to share certain articles. This a bit more coordinated than posting to Facebook and Twitter.

We also set aside 30 minutes to an hour a week for a phone call to discuss engagement strategy with the DeSmogBlog team.

Another, sort of different approach we take is sharing our content to other reporters. We will pitch story ideas to both large and small organizations as well as alternative, independent journalists given the nature of our site’s content. A lot of what we produce is academic driven, so we try to share our information to maximize what we have. We’re a small organization, so it helps disseminate the information.

What are your metrics for success when it comes to engagement strategy?
How many people are reading and sharing the content. It’s a good indication of interest in the topic. It’s also a good indication whether your outreach strategy is actually working.

Another metric is some sort of social change or policy change. Simply advancing a debate in a productive way by getting politicians to react and the general public to talk about the issue more frequently.

What non-digital engagement strategies have been most successful?
By going to events such as speaking event, meetings and conferences. Mainly conferences — whether I’m speaking or representing my organization.

It’s always better to meet someone in person when possible. It’s a great way to build allies and expand your network.

Using the telephone when possible is also a good way to interact with people.

To what degree does your audience influence the work you produce?
It can, and it does. We don’t have a ton of commenters, but we have a few that have been pretty influential. We also get a lot of people [from around the world] who send in tips to the editor.
It doesn’t drive what we ultimately do, but it could lead us in a certain direction.

**To what extent are you approachable by audience members outside the Internet?**
As a small organization with two full-time staff and a bunch of freelancers, it’s harder to put on events. However, individual reporters can go out and engage with the communities they live in.

**Has your audience ever contracted, and what was your strategy to recover from a diminished user base?**
We are still growing as an organization.

**How do you think audience engagement be different in one year, or five years, from now?**
It’s kind of like a battle right now. Is it going to be super online-based where people are reading stuff as an “online community” or are people going to gather in local places such as a bookstore to discuss what do about issues?

I see it going in the wrong direction personally. I see media organizations referring to the audience as subjects, which subjectifies them.

Online options can be misleading. People who master the techniques can just really get people to think they have all this choice, but really they’re being hyper-targeted and hyper-marketed at. It’s a battle, and books are being written about it now.

It’s the marketers who’ve really figured out SEO optimization and email optimization, etc.