



SYMPOSIUM:

Reporting with the iPadJournos: Educating the Next Generation of Mobile and Social Media Journalists

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Journalism students Nicolas Nightingale and Zachary Holden were conducting interviews for a story about daylight crimes at Virginia Commonwealth University when another news story unfolded before them on the urban campus in Richmond. A homeless man who allegedly tried to steal a purse from a university lab was chased and captured by several VCU students, who then formed a circle around him until police arrived. Nightingale pulled out his iPad, started shooting the man's arrest by campus police and immediately tweeted about the breaking news story via the iPad's Twitter app. As it turned out, the man was suspected of several campus larcenies and had an outstanding warrant. A TV producer noticed the students' tweets and a few hours later the iPad arrest video made the evening news on the local CBS affiliate.

Nightingale and Holden were students in my Social Media Journalism class, which pioneered the use of iPads in a VCU course during the spring semester 2012. Combining mobile technology and social media platforms, students reported news via Facebook and Twitter apps, posted videos on YouTube, and curated social media conversations via Storify. We abandoned our assigned PC lab and moved into the School of Mass Communications' computer-free conference room, turning our class into the "iPadJournos" project. All we needed to run this class were the university's wireless network and a projector ... and an iPad for every student.

Replacing computers with iPads

The idea of adopting iPads for an entire reporting class developed a year earlier when I listened to my colleague Jake Batsell of Southern Methodist University at the International Online Journalism Symposium at the University of Texas-Austin. Batsell had used iPads for a news platform study with his students. That led me to think about the iPad for more than just news consumption: It could be a multimedia news-reporting tool.

I discussed this with the staff of VCU's Center for Teaching Excellence, a hub for technology innovations in the classroom. Then, in the fall of 2011 I joined an interdisciplinary learning community for faculty interested in mobile learning. My goal was to educate myself about applications for iPads. Soon after, I applied for an internal CTE grant to equip my upcoming Social Media Journalism special topics class with several iPads that students could share.

Fortunately, at the same time, the CTE's co-director Jeff Nugent was looking to fund an iPad pilot project at VCU. He doubled my initial request and funded 16 iPads for my class project, an investment of approximately \$10,000. Quickly, we decided to completely replace computers and digital cameras with the iPads as the only classroom technology for this pilot project. For the setup and maintenance of the iPads, we brought on board the Technology Services Support team of VCU's College of Humanities and Sciences.

Finding a media partner

About a month before the project started, I began discussing a partnership with the CBS affiliate in Richmond, WTVR-CBS 6. The station is very active on social media and embraces Facebook and Twitter as day-to-day reporting tools. All TV reporters at the station had just been equipped with iPhones to bolster the social media reporting efforts. The station's director for interactive media, Scott Wise, joined the project as a mobile and social media expert and agreed to publish the students' mobile multimedia reporting packages throughout the semester. Other CBS 6 reporters and producers visited our class as guest speakers on specific mobile and social media topics. Social media experts from other media organizations, such as USA Today, Tumblr, and the Richmond Times-Dispatch, also spoke to the class.

Setting up the class

The Social Media Journalism class started in mid-January 2012 with 14 students who were all equipped with an iPad for the duration of the semester. I gave some basic instructions on the functionality of the iPad and on downloading essential news and social media apps. I limited my own lecturing on the iPad and put that responsibility on the students, who had to present social media tools and apps in almost every class session. This led students to explore the "cool tools" of mobile and social media and created a collaborative atmosphere in the class. The students just walked up to the front of the class with their iPads, connected to the projector, and presented what they found on their explorations of the Apple App Store.

We used the electronic version of Mark Briggs' *Journalism Next* (CQ Press) as the textbook for multimedia production, and downloaded it to the iPads via the Kindle app from Amazon. I shared the other assigned readings on the social bookmarking platform Diigo.

The class was run completely paperless and outside of VCU's Blackboard system. Blackboard was used only for posting grades. I created a WordPress site for all class material and assignments. Documents were shared via Google Drive and discussions outside of class took place in a closed Facebook group that also brought students and social media experts together. At the same time, students used the hashtag #ipadjournos on Twitter for open discussions among themselves and with the social media community in Richmond. A connection with the Social Media Club

of Richmond was set up early in the semester through a class visit to one of the club's monthly events. We used an "iPadJournos" Facebook page and a Twitter account to present our work publicly.

Working in the iPad newsroom

As part of their assignments, students were paired and had to pitch three multimedia story ideas to me during the semester. After I signed off on the ideas, students proposed their ideas directly to CBS 6. While Scott Wise came to the classroom during the first round of story pitches, we moved the process completely online afterwards, which turned out to be very efficient. Students pitched their ideas to me and we discussed them in our class. Once we agreed on the focus, students wrote a brief summary of their idea in our Facebook group and received feedback from Wise in a very short time, usually within minutes. This ensured that students produced stories that satisfied the demands of the CBS 6 newsroom. And with one or two exceptions, all multimedia stories were published on the TV station's website.

Students used their iPads to do all their reporting while in the field. They shot video interviews with the subjects of their stories. They shot photos to illustrate their news packages and edited them with the Photoshopper app. And they posted about their reporting on Facebook and Twitter as their stories came together. Since we did not have external keyboards for the iPads, however, many students used their own laptops to write stories, which were uploaded to Google Drive for quick collaborative editing between the students and me. Video production, nevertheless, was mostly done with the iMovie app, although some students preferred to take the video into our editing bays equipped with Adobe Premiere Pro. To share large files from the iPad, we used VCU's file sharing site or uploaded videos to YouTube.

We sent multimedia packages to CBS 6 only after the student work went through several rounds of editing and revising. It took weeks at the beginning of the semester to establish these reporting and editing routines. But by the second and third rounds of multimedia production, we were turning around stories in a quick, professional manner. The fact that students knew their efforts would lead to publication helped to keep them engaged. Stories were filed in the evenings and on weekends, with students on standby during the editing process and CBS 6 staff expecting stories on deadline. Some students even used the opportuni-

ty to produce an additional story to strengthen their personal portfolios. In total, 22 multimedia packages from the class were published on the CBS 6 website.

Developing social media portfolios

Besides producing content for CBS 6, students also worked on their own social media portfolios to put them in a competitive position for internships and jobs at the end of the semester. Every student in the class had to create a personal blog and a Facebook page, and each maintained a Twitter account. They were expected to use their blog as the base for their social media activities and as the focal point of their portfolio. This included a professional photo, a personal description, and a showcase of their journalistic work. They had to post daily on Twitter and several times a week on their Facebook pages, and had to increase their following by specific target numbers. While the quantification of specific expectations on social media creates a somewhat artificial engagement at the beginning of the semester, it forces students to regularly engage on the platforms and helps to make social media part of their work routine as the semester progresses.

The students also had to develop a professional presence on the business network LinkedIn and demonstrate news curation skills on Storify. In addition, they had to choose one additional social media platform and engage on it regularly during the latter part of the semester. Their choices ranged from Google+ and Tumblr to Pinterest and Foursquare. This allowed them to venture out on their own and decide which platforms worked best for them.

Developing a social media portfolio and being branded as an “iPadJournos” put many of the students in a very competitive position for internships at local and national media. Students worked for *The Washington Post* and CNN during the presidential election, reported for *Richmond Magazine*, and interned with the technology shop Create Digital, which develops social media strategies for national clients. And some students were, of course, directly hired for internships at CBS 6. The conversation between the students and me has continued beyond the semester, and the Facebook group is still used to share ideas, resources, and job opportunities.

Planning the future of the iPadJournos project

Every technology experiment comes with challenges, and so did the “iPadJournos” project. The iPad is a fantastic tool that has changed the way we consume

and produce news. But it also has limitations. The photo camera on our second-generation iPads had some problems when used inside and in settings with difficult lighting. The iPad’s built-in microphone also created some challenges. Students had to practice so they could hold the iPad steady when shooting videos. Some problems were averted when we added the students’ smart phones to their tool kits, because photo quality on the iPhone and Android was significantly better. The next generation of the iPad has already led to improvements as well. In future semesters we will add an adapter and lavalier microphone to improve sound quality. A keyboard for every iPad would be a great improvement for the future, but this is, of course, a budgetary issue. The next great challenge will be to replace this first batch of iPads with a newer generation.

Despite those challenges, the “iPadJournos” showed our students and project partners the great potential of mobile and social media reporting. It also helped to implement iPad technology into additional classes. I used the iPads in my Social Media Networking class in the summer semester 2012 and in my special topics class, Social Media and the Presidential Race, in the fall semester 2012. After our pilot project, VCU also launched two iPad projects in other departments and is planning to expand its mobile learning initiatives.

The “iPadJournos” class will be offered as a special topics course in spring 2013. This time it will be supported by a Knight News Challenge Bridge Grant that will improve its collaborative aspects, especially for video sharing. Faculty members are discussing ways to turn this project into a permanent journalism course. Revised accreditation standards of the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications allow students to take more mass communications credits, and can greatly help to introduce innovative reporting projects into the curriculum. By changing credit requirements, we won’t have a copy editing or media law class competing for space in the curriculum with new offerings. A mobile and social media skills class such as the “iPadJournos” project can be added without sacrificing parts of the traditional journalistic skill set.

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