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How to be a multimedia superhero

Commentary by Emily Sweeney

Superman's alter ego made a good point, which is relevant in today's evolving media industry. Now, more than ever, journalists are expected to have a broad understanding of different media.

For most of my journalism career, my professional development was mainly focused on writing and reporting. Now I devote more time to learning about video and other multimedia tools. My goal is to become a multimedia superhero — someone who can edit an audio clip faster than a speeding bullet, produce videos that are more powerful than a locomotive, and capable of leaping from one software application to another in a single bound. Luckily, I've always been interested in computers and technology. I've been blogging on my own since 2001 and designed my own Web site four years ago. As demand for online content grows, acquiring and mastering online media skills have become more than a personal hobby for me; this stuff is coming in



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SPJ Blogs

Freedom of the Prez
News Gems

handy at work.

Reporters who can produce an edited MP3 clip or a video clip to accompany their news stories can become a valuable asset to any newsroom. And even if you never use an interactive map or video with your news stories, this kind of knowledge can help you collaborate more effectively with designers, photographers, video producers and other folks in the newsroom.

Here are my seven tips to becoming a multimedia superhero:

1. Be the (Web)master of your domain.

Why should you build your own Web site? Here are a few reasons: Web sites provide a perfect place for journalists to showcase their work — your site can be your own online portfolio. And the process of building a site can be fun and educational. You'll begin to learn the basics of HTML and gain a better understanding of how the Web works.

To get started, go to [J-Learning](#). This site is run by the University of Maryland's Philip Merrill College of Journalism and has excellent tutorials about Web hosting and HTML coding.

2. Start a blog.

C'mon, everyone's doing it. Why aren't you? All kidding aside, blogging has become an increasingly accepted and widely used form of communication. For tips on starting your own, take a look at Sreenath Sreenivasan's "[Blogging for Journalists](#)" blog.

One word of caution: Be sure to consult with your editors before embarking on any Web publishing adventures. People have lost their jobs because of what they wrote on their personal blog or Web site. So before you start posting, find out what your newspaper's policy is.

To learn more about the legal issues that crop up in the blogosphere, the [Electronic Frontier Foundation's legal guide for bloggers](#) can be a helpful resource.

3. Expand your social network.

I joined Friendster in June 2003. Then I joined MySpace.com. I quickly learned that these social networking sites can be a treasure trove of contacts and news tips. They're helpful for finding sources and having sources locate you. More recently, I joined another site called LinkedIn, which can connect you to your colleagues and folks in all kinds of industries.

4. Shoot video.

If you have a camcorder, use it. Most PCs come with a handy video editing program called Windows Movie Maker, and Macs have iMovie. Online video services such as [Motionbox.com](#) and [Jumpcut.com](#) offer free editing tools so you can upload your footage and edit it right there on their Web site. Try 'em out. Edit a great family film. Or start a video blog.

5. Map it.

I love Google Maps. You can make an interactive map for just about anything: yard sales, movie theater locations, parade routes, homicides, local landmarks ... the possibilities are endless. To make your own map, try [Quikmaps.com](#) and [Mapbuilder.net](#) — both sites provide tools that allow you to create customized maps easily and embed them in your Web site or blog.

6. Grab sound bites.

Buy a digital voice recorder (if you can afford one) and then download a free copy of Audacity editing software. Audacity is a powerful sound editing program that gives you everything you need to import and edit voice and music clips, produce MP3s and much more.

7. Bookmark this site:

journalism.berkeley.edu/multimedia.

Its "Five Steps to Multimedia Reporting" is from the good folks at the Western Knight Center for Specialized Journalism program, a partnership of the UC Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism and the USC Annenberg School for

Who's News?
FOI FYI
LDF Shield

Discussion
Boards

Resources for...
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Freelancers
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Young journalists
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journalists

Communication. It has step-by-step guides for producing all kinds of multimedia content, from editing audio and video to making animated Flash movies. It's a great primer for producing your first multimedia project.

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