CHAPTER 4

NEWSGATHERING

Multimedia

Journalists who report for multiple media need to know how to do more than scratch the surface and meet a deadline. They must also be able to keep the strengths and needs of each platform in mind, so they can produce meaty stories online as well as on the air. In this chapter, we cover how to gather elements specifically for multimedia reports.

You're heading out the door to cover a story for TV, but that won't be the only version you have to file. You will need to post updates and photos on social media sites and write a separate story for the Web, too. Knowing that in advance will change the way you report the story, because you'll need different elements to do it justice in each medium.

Approaching every story with a multimedia mind-set is a far better strategy than searching for elements you can use on different platforms after your reporting is done. A television reporter who gathers details and data along the way will be better prepared to write for the Web as well. A radio reporter who thinks about images from the start can more easily produce an online version. It's a good idea to get in the habit of reporting this way because many newsrooms now expect it.

One way to think about multimedia newsgathering is in "3-D," with data, documents and diverse sources, says Randy Reddick, a pioneer in the field of computer-assisted reporting. Data and statistics allow reporters to make comparisons over time or between groups, which adds perspective to their stories. Documents can add background or validate or refute a claim, and diverse sources can add texture and authenticity. Data sets and original documents can be posted online to supplement your stories or can be used to create interactive graphics. To acquire all this extra information and master the 3-D approach, you'll need more than basic reporting skills.

THINKING ACROSS PLATFORMS

Multimedia reporters look for the same universal building blocks of great stories that we discussed in Chapter 2: character, place, emotion, detail and tension. And they may need many of the elements we discussed in Chapter 3, including crisp audio and vivid video. But they may concentrate more or less on certain elements depending on the platform they'll be using to tell the story. Let's take a closer look at how the strengths and weaknesses of each medium change the reporting process on one specific story.

REPORTING CHECKLISTS

Many reporters use mental checklists to make sure they collect the elements they'll need to tell a story in multiple media. They ask the traditional reporting questions a little differently.

Television	*Online*
Who	*Who*
Who can speak most effectively on camera about the story?	Who can give me data, background or original documents to flesh out this story?
Whose personal experience can best illustrate the story?	
What	*What*
What visuals do I need to support the story?	What interactive elements can I add to this story?
What natural sound can I go on to tell this story?	What information could be told better in a graphic?
Where	*Where*
Where can I go to show what happened?	Where did things happen that I could put on a static or clickable map?
Where would it make sense to be on camera in this story?	Where can I refer people for more information?
When	*When*
When do I need to be at these locations?	When did things happen that I could put on a static or clickable timeline?

TRADE TOOLS

Story Elements

Let's say you're reporting on the Census Bureau's announcement that the U.S. population hit 300 million at 4:46 a.m. today. To tell that story on TV, you'd probably want to contact hospitals in your area to find a baby born at about that time whose birth could illustrate the bigger picture and give the viewer a personal connection to the story. Because TV is a visual medium, you'd ask for video of the maternity ward and an interview with the family. You might also want to talk with a demographer on camera.

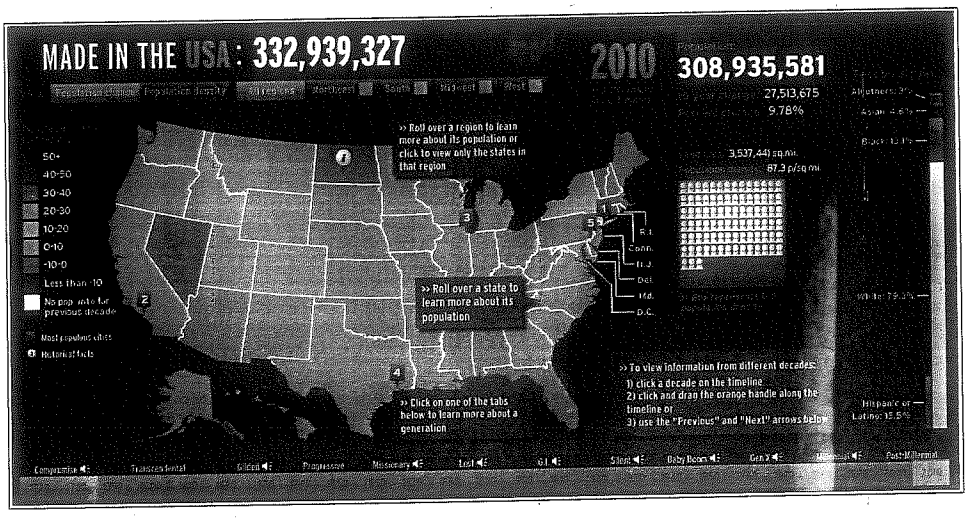
While your TV story about the population milestone would mention that Hispanics are one of the fastest-growing minorities in the country, it wouldn't include a lot of statistics. By contrast, your Web version would give exact percentages for all minorities and compare the numbers with where they stood at a previous milestone, say, when the population hit 200 million in the 1960s. It would also explain how the Census Bureau counts the population and how the U.S. population compares with other countries around the world. Get in the habit of collecting these specifics as you report to save yourself time and frustration later.

To tell the population story online, you might also want to use the data you collected to create interactive graphics. MSNBC, for example, created an interactive map. Different colors indicated which states had the greatest population growth and density. Users could select individual states to get more specific numbers. They could choose a decade on a timeline from 1770 to 2010 to see population estimates and a racial breakdown of the country at that time. Users could also click to listen to audio files of historians or demographers describing what life was like for people born at different times.

Reporters planning to tell a story on the Web need to collect elements that clearly go together, says Jonathan Dube, vice president of AOL News and publisher of CyberJournalist.net. "Look for words to go with images, audio and video to go with words, data that will lend itself to interactives, etc.," he says.[1]

Story Development

Multmedia journalist Victoria Lim often reports the same story on multiple platforms. Her television stories are restricted by the amount of time and visuals she has, but she can use much more information online. Because she has that outlet, she reports differently than she used to. "Deeper, wider, longer interviews, much more background," she says. "[Multimedia] requires you to think about more than, well, I only have a minute thirty to give the nuts and bolts because you need more than nuts and bolts."



MSNBC's interactive population map allowed users to compare states by population change or density. Notice the timeline at the bottom with click-to-listen audio files of demographic experts describing the characteristics of different generations.

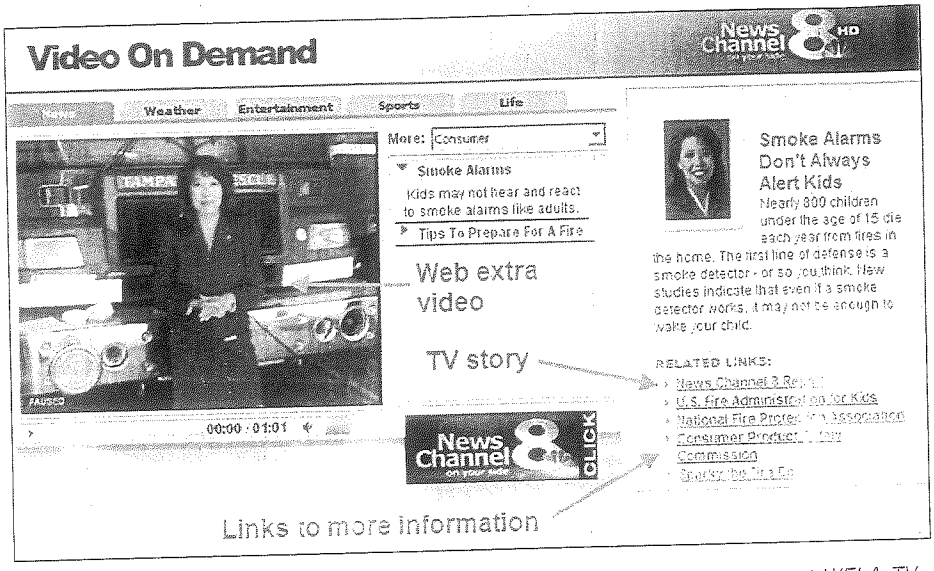
Source: "Made in the USA." Retrieved from MSNBC.com, www.msnbc.msn.com/id/15253291 (accessed May 24, 2014).

For a story about insurance companies refusing to write policies for people who own trampolines, Lim interviewed a woman who had been denied coverage, an insurance agent, and the trampoline industry association. She also talked to the Consumer Product Safety Commission about trampoline safety and the state Office of Insurance Regulation to find out which insurance companies might cover trampolines. None of the reporting she did was wasted, but she developed each story differently based on the strengths of each medium.

Her television story opened with video of the woman's trampoline piled up in her shed, and we heard from the woman who was furious that her kids couldn't use it anymore. Lim then broadened out the story to explain why trampolines are considered a bad insurance risk, and she included sound bites from the trampoline and insurance industries. Her print story included more statistics about injuries from trampolines and other sports equipment, plus the advice about trampoline safety that didn't fit in her TV story. Both the print and TV versions were posted online, along with a Web-only video segment—a short stand-up

GO ONLINE

Module 4: Consider the strengths of multimedia elements in action.



A Web-extra report by Victoria Lim when she was senior consumer reporter at WFLA-TV in Tampa, Florida, offered tips on how families could prepare for a fire emergency. Users could click links for more information, to read Lim's newspaper column in the Tampa Tribune or to watch her TV story about how children often sleep through smoke alarms.

Source: "Multimedia/Convergence Reporting," http://www.victorialim.com/convergence.htm (accessed July 5, 2010).

with a little b-roll—in which Lim explained how to use a trampoline safely. She also compiled a list of insurance companies in Florida that might cover trampolines and posted that on the Web, along with a link to the CPSC. Lim's stories were built around the universal building blocks of character, emotion and detail, as well as the multimedia building blocks of sound, visuals and interactivity.

Many multimedia stories use the same audio and video elements as broadcast stories do, but as you will see they're often collected differently. Some elements, like still photos and captions, that are widely used in print are approached differently for online use. And some elements, like links and interactive graphics, are specific to online stories.

ONLINE AUDIO

The same rules for recording crisp audio discussed in Chapter 3 apply to online use as well, but in some cases the sound will be captured separately from the images. That can

add a degree of difficulty but also provides a level of flexibility not available to video journalists.

Slide Show Sound

When recording audio to use with an online slide show, you can shoot pictures first and record sound later, but make sure you don't leave a scene until you have captured the sound you need. You'll also want to ask specific questions about each person, object, activity and setting you've already shot. "If I have a really nice moment in a photo, I have to ask the person about that later, asking them how that happened or how they felt when it happened," says Josh Meltzer, a former staff photographer at The Roanoke Times.

NPR producer Andrea Hsu has worked on multiple projects and developed her own technique.

"I took photos of everything and then figured out what fit where with my audio," said Hsu. "I sometimes hear something while I'm recording audio and then take a picture."

When photojournalist Joe Mahoney worked for the Richmond Times Dispatch, he would usually spend a couple of minutes recording ambient sound on location while he was looking for people to interview for his story. When covering a wedding involving a bride and groom of Indian heritage, for example, he recorded a few minutes of the wedding music to use as a second track on his story. You can't underestimate the importance of good audio, Mahoney says. "It doesn't matter how good your pictures are, if your sound is lousy, your story will be lousy."

Interviews

Even experienced broadcast reporters have to think differently about how they do interviews when the audio also may be used for the Web. For the conversation to make sense, the audience has to be able to hear the reporter's questions as well as the answers, so it's a good idea to get in the habit of putting a mic on both the subject and the reporter. If you have only one microphone, move it back and forth to capture the conversation in full. And because your questions may wind up on the Web, approach all recorded interviews as you would a live interview on radio or television. Keep your questions short and to the point. Avoid using acronyms or jargon that your interview subject understands but the general public might not.

Just because you can use more audio online than you would on radio or TV, don't succumb to the temptation to conduct much longer interviews. Some reporters find it easier to do two interviews—one for information and a second, shorter one they record for online use—but they have to make sure the interview subject agrees beforehand to answer some of the same questions twice.

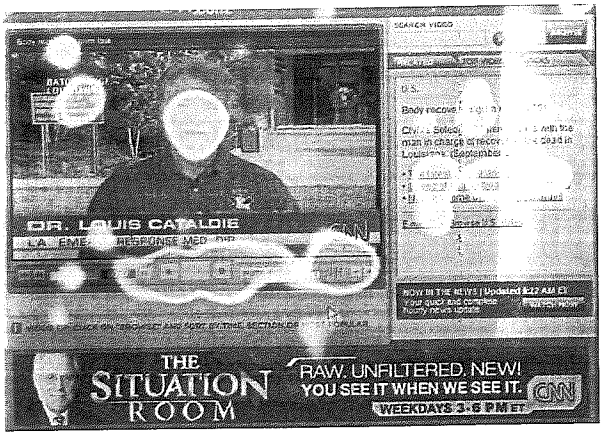
ONLINE VIDEO

If you're shooting video specifically for use in digital media, the general approach outlined in Chapter 3 still applies, but there are a few additional considerations to keep in mind. Although technology is evolving quickly, the experience of watching video on a computer screen, tablet or smartphone isn't quite the same as watching it on television.

Basic Rules

It's even more important to keep the camera steady when shooting video for online use because shaky shots and shots with a lot of movement like pans and zooms can look blurry. When shooting video for use on smartphones, "remember your image will be quite small," says Regina McCombs, a multimedia producer-photographer. "This means you need to fill up your frame."[2] As a result, close-ups and medium shots work better than wide, establishing shots.

You also want to minimize background elements that may be distracting to the online user. A study by the Nielsen Norman Group found that Web users' attention was diverted from a "talking head" at the center of an online video segment to a sign behind the person being interviewed.[3] Try to keep your framing clean and simple for online video. The foreground or background elements you might include to give TV video some depth just don't work as well online.



The splotches on this "heat map" show where people looked the longest when they watched a video story on CNN.com. Notice how they seemed to be distracted by the video controls and the signs in the background.

Source: "Eyetracking Study of Web Video," Jakob Nielsen's Alertbox, www.useit.com/alertbox/video.html (accessed December 5, 2005).

Other Options

Some multimedia journalists believe the conventions of TV news need not apply to all online video. British video journalist Adam Westbrook suggests having the interviewee look directly into the lens, rather than positioning the camera off to the side. "This allows them to make direct eye-contact with the viewer," he says, "and gives the audience use of the full range of their facial expressions."[4]

This approach works best when using a small camera; a full-size camera would be too intimidating. And while it's certainly true that webcam interviews have made the straight-to-camera look more acceptable, make sure the outlet you are shooting for is willing to use video shot this way before you try it.

PHOTOS

If you're not used to working with stills, you may need a refresher on the importance of composition and the role of captions. A well-composed still frame has a clear center of interest that draws the eye. According to the "rule of thirds," that center of interest should fall at the intersection of those imaginary lines that split the frame into thirds, horizontally and vertically. And just as you do in video, make sure subjects in close-up shots have enough headroom and "looking room" in the frame.

You may not always be able to shoot an original photo for use with an online story, but there are alternatives. Search for images at CreativeCommons.org that are free to use under what's called a "share alike" license. Usually, all you have to do is provide attribution and a link back to the original image.

Captions

A text caption should convey basic information that helps viewers understand what they are looking at. It almost always tells the "who" and "where" of the image. Make sure you have this information for each photo before you leave a location, including correct spelling of all names. It's very difficult to play catch-up afterward. You'll most likely need that same information for online metadata.

If your camera or cell phone has geotagging capability, which automatically adds location data, make sure it's turned on. And be sure you have the correct date and time set, so the data embedded in your photo's digital file are accurate.

Notice how following the "rule of thirds" makes a difference in these photos. The picture with the woman doing Tai Chi centered in the frame (left) is less pleasing to the eye than the other. The elements in a photo that should draw your attention should be located at the intersections of the grid.

Source: Photos courtesy of the authors.

Slide Shows

Even for experienced news photographers, shooting stills for the Web is a little different. "I shoot the photographs for my slideshow like I shoot a video sequence—by taking wide, medium and lots of tight shots," says Colin Mulvany, multimedia producer at the Spokane Spokesman-Review.

Joe Mahoney of the Richmond Times Dispatch says it's not unusual for him to take 200–300 photos when he's on a shoot. He looks through them all in a kind of rough edit and then selects 15–20 that he thinks might be good enough for a slide show. Then he puts them in a logical order so they tell a complete story. "A picture story is like any other, it needs a beginning, middle and end. Your first photo has to be something that grabs you," Mahoney says.

LINKS

One advantage online stories have over broadcast news is the ability to include links to additional information and interactive graphics. Links can add background and context for users to explore. They also provide attribution and transparency, to reinforce a story's credibility. "Links are the signposts of the Internet," says Marcus Brauchli of the Washington Post. "Without them, we lose readers."[5]

Background

If you've used the online tools suggested in Chapter 2 for saving your story research, you'll have a ready-made directory of links to the sources you consulted when reporting. At a minimum, you should collect links to other stories on the same or related subjects produced by your own news outlet. It's also a good idea to find and save links to online bios or social profiles of key individuals in your story, as well as digital information about businesses or organizations that are the focus of your reporting.

Be sure to save links to primary source material like government documents or data sets that you've used for calculations. Your news organization may want to post that material on its own site, but in many cases a link will suffice. We talk about ways to make primary source material more accessible and valuable to users in Chapter 8.

Credibility

One key function of links is to show your work, so readers can judge for themselves the accuracy of your journalism. "Skeptical readers can click the links and check the facts for themselves," says digital journalist Steve Buttry. "Readers who don't check the links see them and understand that they represent documentation. Either way, links bolster the public's trust."[6]

Seeking links when reporting a story can save you from embarrassing mistakes. Take the widely reported story that Notre Dame football player Manti Te'o had learned that his girlfriend had died shortly before leading his team to an upset win. The trouble is, the story was false: The girlfriend was a fake. A reporter looking for links would have searched for an obituary, Buttry says. "Failing to find an obituary, the reporter would have dug deeper, seeking other confirmation of the woman's death or seeking confirmation of her reported accident or her status as a Stanford alumna. Seeking links to any of those purported facts would have started to unravel the hoax."

GRAPHICS

Charts, diagrams, maps and other graphics can convey significant information visually in news stories in all media. Online, that information can be made interactive, giving users more ways of exploring it. In order to build graphics, you'll need to collect specific types of information in more detail than you would typically need for a TV story.

Get in the habit of asking for data whenever you cover a "numbers" story, whether it's the city budget or election returns. Make it easy for people to give it to you by carrying a USB flash drive so they can provide you with a copy on the spot. A promise to email it to you later is often forgotten, but it's worth asking if all else fails.

Premade Graphics

Get copies of any graphics you run across that you can use "as is" on the air or online. For example, a developer holding a news conference about a building project would likely have renderings to show what the development will look like once it's completed. A good-quality paper version can be scanned and posted quickly. Just make sure you're not violating any copyright protection.

While premade graphics are a time saver, it's important to fact-check the data behind them just as you would a press release. Make sure any premade graphics are clearly labeled with exact numbers. If they aren't, ask for them.

Data for Graphics

To build your own TV graphics or construct interactive graphics for the Web, you'll need raw data. It's easier to work from a data set than to extract data from an existing graphic. Instead of trying to decipher the color code on a complex world population map, for example, you could build your own map from a simple list of countries and their populations.

As you report, think about what kind of graphic might accompany your story online and ask for data so you can build it. For maps, you need precise locations. Even if you don't think you'll label a map with multiple street numbers and addresses, get them so the graphic you build is as accurate as possible. For timelines, you'll want exact dates and perhaps even the time of day when various things happened. Building graphics from incomplete data can confuse or mislead the audience.

Always make sure you clearly understand the data. Ask for an explanation and get contact information for anyone who can walk you through it later if any confusion arises.

Make sure you know the actual source of any data you collect. It may not have originated with the person giving it to you.

SEARCHING ONLINE

To dig deeper for multimedia reporting, you need to know how to find information online quickly and efficiently. When Google became a verb, it also became the go-to site for searching the Web, but while it is fast, it doesn't have everything. For basic searching, many journalists prefer to use a meta search engine like Infospace or Mamma that provides results from multiple sites, or to compare results from Google and Bing. But in many cases, a simple Web search is not sufficient. That's because some information stored online exists in databases that can't be accessed by search engines. So journalists have to know how to conduct more productive searches, by using advanced techniques or checking specific sites on what's known as the "deep Web."

Targeted Searches

Advanced search functions on sites like Google and Bing make it easy to conduct online "Boolean" searches, which combine key words with operators like "or" and "not." You can search for pages that include a specific phrase by putting it in quotation marks or exclude a word by adding a minus sign in front of it; either approach will limit the number of results. It's often more efficient to restrict a search to a site or domain; typing in ".gov" will return results only from U.S. government sites. And you can search for particular file types like .xls, the Microsoft extension for spreadsheets. Searches can be restricted by date, language and country. You can also limit your search for specific words to page titles or URLs.

"Adding certain types of words to a search can produce interesting results," says Alan Pearce, author of "Deep Web for Journalists," "especially when you are looking for documents that may have been inadvertently posted online. These include 'not for distribution,' 'company proprietary,' 'confidential,' 'secret,' etc."[7] All of these techniques can make for more efficient searching.

Another useful tool in advanced searches is the asterisk. Let's say you're trying to remember a famous quote that you want to include in a story, but you're coming up a word or two shy. Type the phrase in quotation marks and substitute an asterisk (*) for the missing word or words. The first search result is likely to be the quote you're looking for. Try it with "blood * tears sweat" and you'll find Winston Churchill's famous words.

The Deep Web

There are dozens of sites online where you can look for specific types of information or find information that search engines may miss. CompletePlanet looks for databases on topics from agriculture to weather. Pipl will search for background on people using a name, email address or phone number and return results from criminal records, blogs and social profiles. Searchsystems.net also will find background on individuals and has links to sources of public records in every state. LLRX.com/courtrules links to federal and state court dockets that can be searched by name. Infomine searches scholarly information. Guidestar tracks information on non-profits, including tax returns.

Some sites not only find information but perform calculations as well. WolframAlpha will pull up publicly available data on whatever you type in. A simple query like "What was $100,000 today worth in 1985?" brings up the precise answer as well as a chart showing the average rate of inflation over that time span.

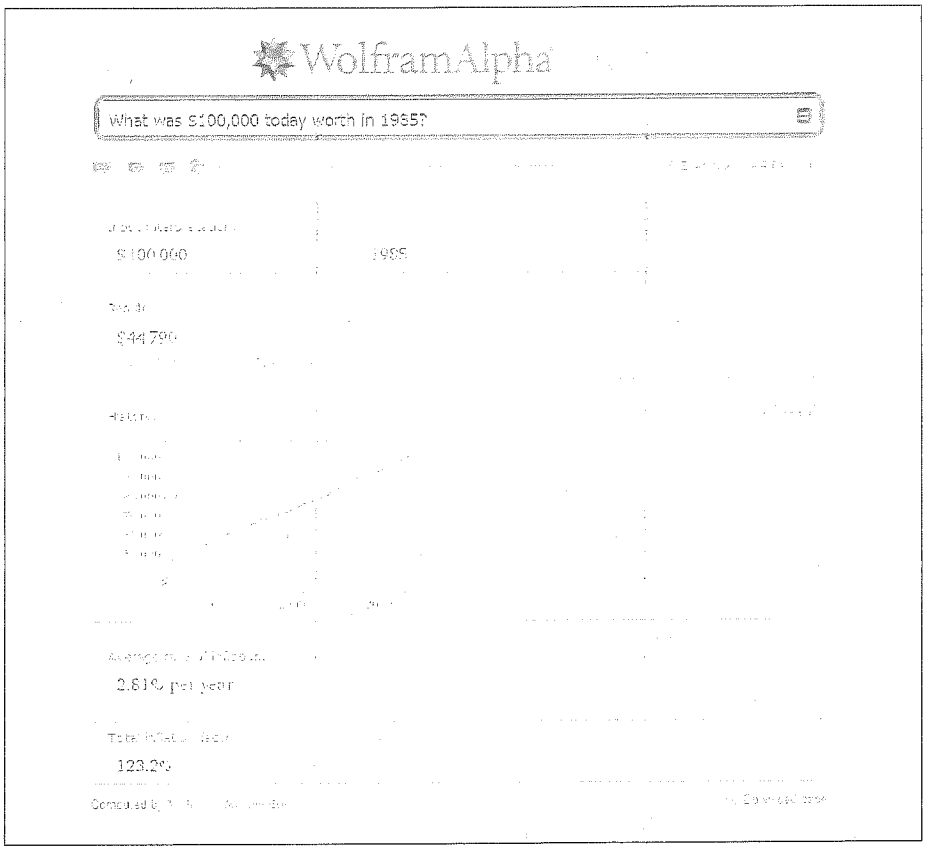
COMPUTER-ASSISTED REPORTING

GO ONLINE

Module 4: Explore data analysis to develop your CAR skills.

Nancy Amons of WSMV-TV in Nashville, Tennessee, is a skilled database reporter who describes herself as a pack rat, always fighting for more file space. "I save data longer than the city does," she says. She's uncovered dozens of stories by crunching the data. One of her favorite stories involved a 20-year-old man who had killed a woman in a traffic accident and had never been prosecuted. "I stumbled on the story by looking at speeding ticket records, hoping to profile the driver with the most tickets," she says. It turned out that driver had a vehicular homicide on his record and had never gone to court. After her story aired, the young man went to prison. That same data set of speeding records had a field showing whether violators' tickets had been erased after they attended traffic school. Amons crunched the numbers again and reported that some people were getting away with going to traffic school half a dozen times a year.

The term "computer-assisted reporting" or CAR has been used to refer to everything from creating multimedia to gathering databases. For the purposes of this text, we'll confine our discussion of CAR to the use of computer programs to analyze information, especially data. CAR isn't just useful for major reporting projects; it can also be used to add depth to daily stories and even to uncover quirky features, like the fact that on the 13th of every month, the number of marriage ceremonies performed in North Carolina drops by 40 percent. The (Raleigh) News & Observer discovered that little gem about love and luck in the state's marriage database.[8]



WolframAlpha gives users the ability to search for information online using built-in data and algorithms. Ask a question in plain English and the site not only calculates a result but puts it in context.

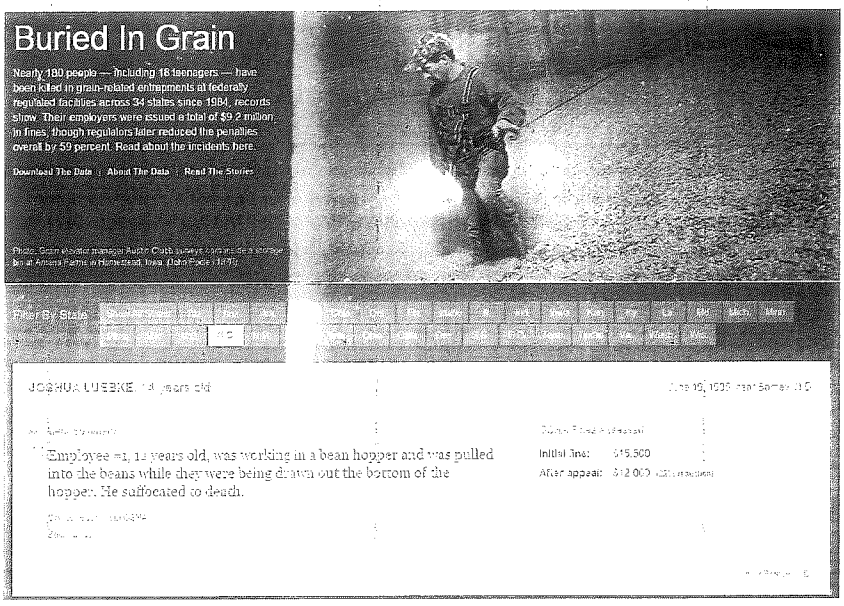
Source: WolframAlpha, https://www.wolframalpha.com/input/?i=What+was+%24100%2C000+today+worth+in+1985 (accessed January 4, 2014).

Data is everywhere. "Data can be numbers, names, dates," says Michelle Minkoff, interactive producer for the Associated Press. She advises reporters to think of ways to put all kinds of information—the who, what, where, when and how—into columns and rows for analysis. That can give you "the power to break news by knowing things that other people don't."

Finding Data

Government data is a journalist's gold mine. Police incidents, highway patrol citations, medical examiner reports, state university payrolls, political contributions—reporters have used all of these records and more to develop stories and track down sources they would never have discovered any other way. When a child in Florida was killed by her family's pet Burmese python, reporter Mark Douglas asked the state fish and wildlife commission for a database of all permits to own venomous reptiles. He found more than 40 for Burmese pythons, along with the owners' names and phone numbers—a gold mine of potential sources.

A lot of data is readily available online at searchable sites like Data.gov for U.S. government facts and figures or Data.UN.org for international data. Many news organizations



NPR and the Center for Public Integrity investigated deaths in grain storage facilities across the country. The NPR site included a complete data set from the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

Source: "Buried in Grain," NPR.com, http://apps.npr.org/buried-in-grain (accessed July 17, 2013).

have found Opendata.socrata.com to be a useful source, but always verify that the data set is accurate by checking with the source it is ascribed to.

Getting Data

Ask for raw data in a form you can use. Microsoft Excel, for example, uses .xls files, while Access files have the extensions .mdb or .dbf. It's sometimes safer to ask for a text file or ASCII file,[9] delimited by comma (CSV), space or tab, which allows you to import the data into almost any spreadsheet or database program.

If you see a table on the Web, you can import the data directly into a spreadsheet. If you can only get data in PDF format, a free tool like Cometdocs or Zamzar will convert it to text or Excel.

Obviously, your best bet is to get data in digital form, but if the information is available only on paper, you'll need to enter it into a program by hand so you can sort and compare the information efficiently. To get data from some government agencies, you may need to file an FOI request as we discuss a bit later in this chapter.

Data Analysis

In order to work with the data you gather while reporting, it helps to know how to use a spreadsheet. Crunching the numbers yourself is the best way to "interview" the data, to see what story those numbers tell. And more and more journalists have recognized the importance of being data literate. "Can you imagine a reporter not using the Internet now?" asks Simon Rogers, data editor at Twitter. "That's what it'll be like for reporters who can't be bothered to learn to use a spreadsheet."

If you're working with budgets, you can program a spreadsheet like Excel to perform calculations, say the difference between last year's spending and this year's and the percentage change from one year to the next. Then, by sorting the numbers, you can easily see which budget categories increased and which were cut and by how much. As you become more experienced, you can begin to compare data sets using a "relational" database program like Access. Just by asking the right questions, you could learn how many convicted felons have hunting permits, for example, or how many sex offenders live near day care centers.

Before you do any analysis, save a master copy of the spreadsheet. This is critically important, because every calculation you make will change the data in some way. "Think of the spreadsheet as a notebook and keep a record of each calculation," advise Elena

Egawhary and Cynthia O'Murchu, authors of a data journalism handbook published by the Centre for Investigative Journalism. "Every time you do a new calculation, save a version. If anyone questions your story you need to be able to retrace your steps and show how you reached your conclusion."[10]

Once you have the data in your computer, make sure it's "clean" and complete. Check for inconsistencies in categories or spelling and see if any pieces of data are duplicated or missing. If something looks strange, talk to whoever prepared the data. If the data set is not huge, it takes only a few clicks to perform the most basic analysis in a spreadsheet, such as sorting the numbers in ascending or descending order. That's how Amons determined who had the most speeding tickets in Nashville.

It's beyond the scope of this book to explain data analysis in detail, but the key to good computer-assisted reporting, says Amons, is to remember that the data are not the story. The people and the problems you uncover are the story. The data are evidence, which you will refer to in your TV story and then post online so the audience can check the facts for themselves.

INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING

Module 4: Watch one of Stuart Watson's award-winning investigative stories.

Investigative reporting is by definition in-depth reporting, requiring extensive research and interviewing. But investigative stories often begin the way ordinary stories do, with a phone call or a conversation. When a waitress at a diner in Charlotte, North Carolina, mentioned her grandson's unpleasant experience at a local dental clinic to WCNC-TV photojournalist Doug Stacker, he passed her name along to reporter Stuart Watson, one of the station's investigative journalists, who decided to check out the story.

The first step was to talk to the child's mother and get her son's dental records. The records showed that 4-year-old Brandon Dillbeck had 16 of his baby teeth drilled and capped with stainless steel crowns—all in one three-hour session. Watson knew he was on the trail of a good story, but his reporting had only just begun. To find out whether the boy's treatment was typical or excessive, Watson needed a dentist to review the dental records. He needed background on the clinic where the work was done, and he needed pictures to tell Brandon's story on television. He also had to try to get a response from the dentists who treated the boy.

"We put that story on the air," Watson says, "and then, as is the case when you find systemic problems, the phone starts ringing." More than six months later, one woman's complaint had led to a series of 13 reports about dental treatment for children on Medicaid. The station's investigative team obtained and analyzed thousands of dental records,

Medicaid billing records, and corporate and property records for the series that eventually won both a Peabody and a duPont-Columbia Award, two of broadcast journalism's most prestigious prizes.

The Investigative Difference

So what makes a story "investigative"? It's not just the time that's spent developing a story nor the length of the finished product, although investigative reporters usually do get more time to research and write and more airtime or space than general-assignment reporters. And it's not just that investigative reporting is enterprising—that is, it requires original work and effort. Lots of daily stories do, too.

What sets investigative reporting apart is its focus on mistakes or wrongdoing that affects the public. True investigative stories are about corruption, mismanagement, dysfunction, dishonesty, system failures or fraud, and they hold the powerful accountable. Because of that, investigative reports require more stringent verification and more disclosure about the sources of information.

Investigative reporters often use specific techniques to obtain and decipher the information they need for their stories, such as using Freedom of Information laws or computer analysis or going undercover.

Using FOI

The federal Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and state open-records laws are tools reporters can use to find stories that won't show up in a news release. These laws basically protect the public's right to know what the government is doing by providing access to records, data and documents. Beat reporters and investigative reporters use FOI laws routinely to search for stories and to document what they hear from their sources.

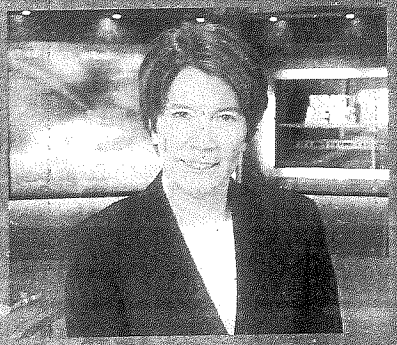
To make the best use of government data, learn your way around. What databases exist on your beat or in your area of interest? What information is included? What form is it in? Who keeps the records? For example, a local government reporter would want to have a list of public employees and their salaries, contracts and disciplinary records, disclosure forms for elected officials, accident and inspection reports for businesses regulated by local government agencies, and any audits and investigations conducted by and of those agencies.

Most of that information is public, so your first step should be to check the Internet to see whether it's been posted online. If you can't find it, then just ask for it. Only if that

KNOW AND TELL

ANSWERING THE "WHY?"

Jayne Miller, a longtime investigative reporter at WBAL-TV in Baltimore, calls investigative reporting "the answer to the why—why did this happen, who screwed up, who greased a palm?" Miller works hard to find those answers and she's broken her share of big stories. How does she do it?



Source: Photo courtesy of WBAL-TV.

"I always have something ...ing on the back burner. I am notorious for ... I work on stories for 12, 18 months before ... get on the air. I'm always collecting. Some ... when you seek information it takes time to ...

"The money in investigative ... of the is the money story, the one everyone will talk about. Knowing how to follow th... what we need to work on. By 2 p.m. everyone knows the news of the day. The only ... they'll come to your news organization is to get something good or something th... don't find anywhere else."

Miller believes the art of ne... gathering has become a lost art. "How do you get information?" she asks. The answer, ... where to find it. And for Miller, that means knowing who has the information and ho... reach them.

"The first thing I ask [stu... is, 'How many of you at 3 a.m. can call the fire chief ... by hitting a contact n... on your phone?' Measure your value by how many contacts you have in your pho... what makes you unique are the human sources you have."

doesn't work should you file a formal FOI request, says Brant Houston, former executive director of Investigative Reporters and Editors, Inc. (IRE). Amons advises reporters to find out how data is kept before requesting it. "If you want court information, for example, start by asking for the form that the clerks use to do data entry from." Knowing the fields and the record layout will help you formulate a request that's easy to fulfill.

Planning and follow-up are critical to a successful FOI request, Houston says. Begin by asking what information is really needed for the story. Keeping your requests reasonable and targeted will improve your chances of success. Then figure out who has the record you're looking for. It's not always obvious, so find out who tracks the specific data you want before you make a request. It's also a good idea to determine who else might have the information, so you know where to go if the first agency says no. Local crime statistics, for example, are usually shared with state and federal agencies, including the FBI. "The farther away you go from the 'official custodian,' the more likely the record will be released," says Houston.

It's useful to know if the kind of record you're after has ever been released before. Knowing whether there's a precedent can help you make a case that you should be allowed to have the information you're requesting. You should also know what exemptions might apply to the records; under the law, exemptions may keep some information from being released to protect national security, individual privacy, business interests and efficient government operations. But the FOI law says that even if part of a document is exempt, the government still has to let you have the rest of it. Take what you can get, Houston advises. If you're looking for trends in Medicaid spending, for example, you may not need to know the names of individual patients.

Not all public records are documents or data. Videos, training tapes, recordings and emails can be considered public under certain circumstances. For example, information the state turns over to defense attorneys in a criminal case can be released if you ask for it. Joe Adams, author of the "Florida Public Records Handbook," advises searching for specific file types, like .pptx for internal PowerPoint presentations or .avi or .mov for video.

Adams says every journalist should know the public records laws and file requests for records on a regular basis. "Ask for records long before you are going to need them," he advises. And always pick up the records you requested, even if your deadline has passed. "Custodians won't take you or your news organization seriously if you don't," he says. "And they won't go out of their way to help you next time."

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Many multimedia journalists use the same basic gear broadcast journalists do: a camera, microphone, audio recorder and so on. And thanks to the latest advances in technology, the mantra for at least some professional photojournalists is "one tool, many platforms," as they can now use the same camera to capture both stills and video good enough for broadcast and the Web. The tool of choice for many is a digital single lens reflex camera

or DSLR, but in order to capture good-quality sound the camera has to be paired with an audio recorder.

Audio Recorders

Digital audio recorders come in a variety of shapes and sizes. The earliest digital format adopted by professionals was the DAT or digital audio tape recorder, which was replaced by the smaller and less expensive minidisc recorder. Today, many journalists carry recorders that use flash memory instead of replaceable media, making it quick and easy to drag and drop the recorded audio files to a computer for storage and editing. Ideally, you want a recorder that lets you control the recording level manually, that has a separate microphone input and a headphone jack for monitoring audio. As we discussed in Chapter 3, to capture good sound you'll want to get the microphone close to the subject.

With an audio recorder, you can gather sound for multimedia journalism without worrying about shooting video at the same time. Photojournalist Josh Meltzer started out by carrying a minidisc recorder and shotgun microphone in a waist pack in addition to his standard still camera. After shooting a story, he'd take out the recorder and ask people to talk about the moments he'd documented with his pictures. Or he'd go back to the office, sit down in a quiet room, and record his comments about the story. He'd then use the stills and audio to create a slide show for his news outlet's website.

Smartphones

Module 4: Learn what mistakes to avoid when shooting with your smartphone.

When news breaks, the best audio recorder or camera available is the one you have on hand. For many journalists, that recorder or camera is built in to their smartphone; capturing audio or shooting photos or video on a phone is a one-touch operation, and what you capture is ready to upload and share instantly. Any doubts about whether smartphone images were suitable for serious journalism were dispelled when Time magazine assigned five photographers to cover Hurricane Sandy using Instagram, the photo-sharing social network. "We just thought this is going to be the fastest way we can cover this and it's the most direct route," says Time's director of photography, Kara Pollack. "It wasn't like, 'Oh, this is a trend, let's assign this on Instagram.' It was about how quickly can we get pictures to our readers."[11]

Lots of accessories have been developed to improve the images, video and audio you can capture with smartphones. There are adapters that allow for the use of an external mic; add-on lenses for close-ups, wide-angle and telephoto shots; and cases that include a tripod mount. All of these are worth considering for your gear bag.

One key rule for shooting video with a smartphone: hold it horizontally to avoid what's been dubbed "vertical video syndrome." If you shoot with the camera held vertically, as you might for a still photo, the resulting video will have black stripes on either side and you'll have wasted a lot of screen space.

SMARTPHONE SHOOTING TIPS

One lesson learned [illegible] YouTube is that technical quality can be secondary when it comes to newsworthy [illegible]. But it's always worth the effort to capture the best video possible under the circumstances.

1. Keep it steady. Shaky video is hard to watch, but that's what you get from a lot of small, light [illegible] cameras. Look for natural tripods, such as a [illegible] wood or a chair, to brace the camera. If nothing is available, hold the camera with both hands and keep your [illegible] close to your side.
2. Avoid the [illegible]. While it's possible to zoom in with a smartphone camera, the quality of the [illegible] goes from marginal to unacceptable very quickly. If you want a tighter shot, move in closer.
3. Get close to [illegible] decent audio. Most built-in microphones capture sound from every direction. If you want to hear something clearly, get close. If you're doing an interview, try to find a quiet spot.
4. Look for the light. If you have the option, try to shoot video in the best possible light. Low-light situations are tough for smartphones and other small cameras.
5. Go for best quality. If your smartphone allows you to change the camera's resolution, use the highest setting possible.
6. Beware of vertical video. The aspect ratio for TV is 16:9 or 4:3, so always hold your camera horizontally when shooting video.

Finally, this may seem obvious, but make sure you know how to use the camera and any apps you have installed before you actually need to. It can take a few steps to get some smartphones into video mode, and if you shoot with one app but need to upload from another, you'll cause yourself headaches that could be avoided.

TRADE TOOLS

DSLR Cameras

Many multimedia journalists use DSLR (digital single lens reflex) cameras because they shoot excellent still photos and high-definition video. Interchangeable lenses make the cameras more versatile than the average video camera, making it easier to capture video in very low light or to control the depth of field, blurring the background, if desired.

TV news manager Geoff Roth used a DSLR to shoot feature stories for his station's website and says it allowed for more intimacy with his subjects. "The setup is not nearly as intimidating as a full-blown broadcast camera setup," he says. "It allows me to work well in close quarters (like many restaurant kitchens). It is less intrusive when shooting a restaurant filled with customers. I can see why several war correspondents use this type of setup to be quick, versatile and not stand out in a crowd."

As we've said about other video cameras, most DSLRs' built-in audio is virtually useless for any professional purpose. "There is also no easy way to monitor audio," Roth says. The usual workaround is to use external mics, plugged into a digital audio recorder. That approach requires additional time, however, because audio and video have to be merged before they can be edited.

TAKING IT HOME

Multimedia journalists need to learn how to use a wide variety of digital tools that can help them tell their stories more effectively. They also need to think differently from the start when reporting for multiple media, keeping in mind the elements that will add depth and context to an online story and collecting them along the way.

Kim Bui, former mobile product manager at KPCC California Public Radio, says multimedia journalism is more work, but it's also liberating. "I think now, with all of these platforms, you can use more of your reporting than ever," she says. "When I was a young reporter, I'd have a notebook full of stuff and have to throw most of it away. Now you can take all of that stuff and use it in different places."

TALKING POINTS

1. The story you're working on about the national survey on drinking and drug use by college students won't just be aired on TV. You'll need to post a Web version

as well. What kind of data would you want to collect? What additional online elements would your story include?

2. Using the strategies described in this chapter, search the "deep Web" for information about a local official or company. What information did you find that might add an angle to a profile story?
3. Imagine that you have acquired the following data sets for your community:
   - Public school bus drivers
   - Registered handgun owners
   - Drunk-driving violations
   - Vehicle recalls
   - Campus liquor law violations
4. What questions might you ask to analyze and compare these data sets in search of possible stories?

ETHICS CHALLENGES

1. Social media tools like Instagram make it easy to manipulate photos, using filters and effects. Are these changes acceptable in news photos?
2. Using a small camera or smartphone, it's possible to record video without anyone knowing it. Do journalists have a responsibility to make sure people know they are being recorded and the video could be posted online? Under what circumstances?

ONLINE LEARNING MODULE 4

For chapter exercises, practice tools and additional resources, activate or buy this chapter's online learning module at journalism.cqpress.com. You'll find:

- SKILL BUILDING: Practice basic computer-assisted reporting skills to analyze a data set and develop story ideas.
- DISCOVER: Watch and analyze an award-winning investigative story.
- EXPLORE: Learn how to use freedom of information laws to find and request public records.
- A digital version of this chapter's text in full color with active links.

Also, continue your work on the ONGOING STORY. Decide how you would add context and depth to this story with data, documents or details.