

## CHAPTER 2

# Collaboration & Specialization

### *Reporting and Editing in Interdisciplinary Teams*

The communication industry is embracing and resisting new trends at breakneck speeds. Media convergence, multimedia storytelling, citizen journalism, wireless apps, and social media are all hot topics. And along with each of these one consistent theme continues to emerge in print, online, and broadcast journalism: collaboration among individuals from different disciplines.

Of course, journalists with different skill sets have always collaborated within organizations. In newspaper newsrooms, reporters, photographers, information graphics artists, and page designers collaborate daily to cover stories. Broadcast news organizations frequently send reporters and videographers on assignments together. And stories that effectively combine words and visuals are often more powerful than those presented in a single story form.

However, it wasn't until the 1990s that collaboration across print, broadcast, and online organizations began to occur regularly. This phenomenon was quickly dubbed "media convergence." And the early part of the twenty-first century was consumed with assessing how newspaper and broadcast organizations could coordinate efforts to achieve cross-platform news coverage.

More recently, efforts at multimedia storytelling have focused on how newspapers and broadcast stations can better harness the power of the web by presenting stories in multiple forms. The practice has been most transformative for newspapers and broadcast stations where careful consideration is given to both traditional and online products. Reporters write stories for print and online, as well as scripts for audio voiceovers. Photographers make and edit pictures for print packages as well as for interactive slideshows and galleries. In addition, many photographers and reporters have become videographers who collect footage for the web. Add to that graphics reporters who develop maps, charts, and diagrams, for print and online, and you have a much more complex, rich news organization.

This chapter explores the role of collaboration in multimedia storytelling both within and among news organizations. Here, we look at different levels of collaboration, how media convergence has evolved, collaborative processes, and how you can prepare yourself to work with partners from different disciplines.

## Media Convergence

One of the most significant concepts tugging at traditional media outlets for the past decade is media convergence. However, the phrase has been pretty loosely defined. Depending on whom you ask, convergence can mean anything from a local newspaper and television news broadcast regularly teasing each other's stories, to formal partnerships that include joint story development.

Some partnerships exist between organizations owned by different media conglomerates. For example in Miami, "news partners" WFOR-TV, a CBS-owned station, and *The Miami Herald*, a McClatchy-owned newspaper, frequently share content and link to one another's sites within stories. Yet, other partnerships exist among different media types under the same corporate ownership. One of the most well-known and studied converged operations is Media General's Tampa partnership that includes *The Tampa Tribune*, tbo.com, and WFLA-TV, Florida's number-one rated station. In March 2000, Media General opened the Tampa News Center, bringing the newspaper, television station, and website together under one roof. On a daily basis, WFLA-TV reporters appear on camera and then write stories for the newspaper. *Tribune* reporters write their stories and then appear on TV. And both develop online packages for tbo.com. The news building was even designed with convergence in mind and includes a universal news desk with editors and producers from all three entities working together. According to J. Stewart Bryan III, Media General's chair-

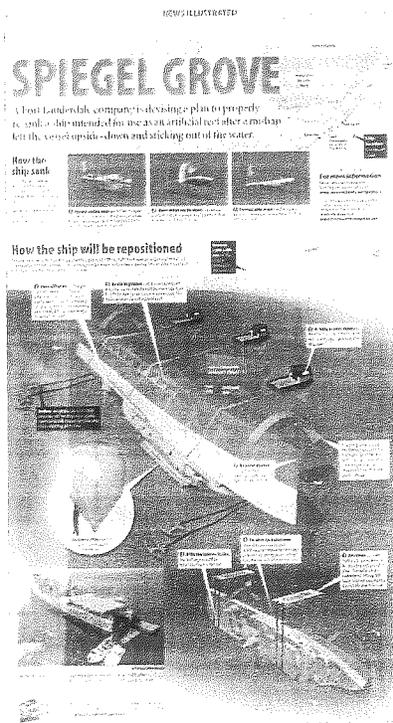


FIGURE 2-1

The *Sun-Sentinel* in Fort Lauderdale frequently partners with other local media. In print, they regularly run full-page print graphics, titled "News Illustrated," on topics that range from science and technology to the War on Terror. In 2002, the *Spiegel Grove*, a retired Navy ship, was left upside down and sticking out of the water after a mishap occurred when officials were trying to sink it for use as an artificial reef. To explain how a Fort Lauderdale company planned to resink the ship, *Sun-Sentinel* graphics reporters created a full-page "News Illustrated" graphic that explained the debacle and how it would be corrected.

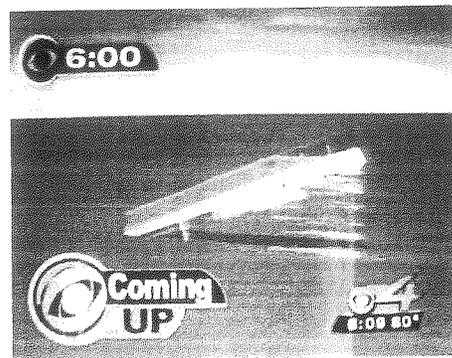


FIGURE 2-2

They also developed an animated graphic for the news broadcast on CBS Channel 4, as well as an interactive graphic for the *Sun-Sentinel*'s website. The animated broadcast graphic included audio voiceover and was combined with video clips of workers preparing the ship for the operation.

Source: Images courtesy of the South Florida *Sun-Sentinel*

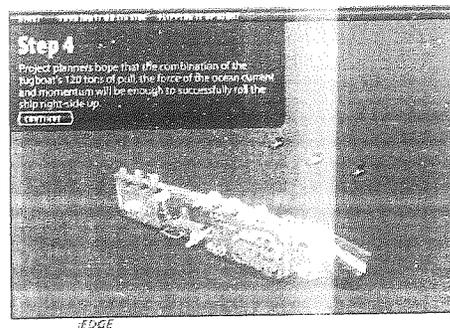


FIGURE 2-3

The interactive graphic presented on the *Sun-Sentinel*'s website allowed users to click through the steps of the resinking process. And each package referred to the others to optimize the number of people who engaged all three.

Source: Images courtesy of the South Florida *Sun-Sentinel*

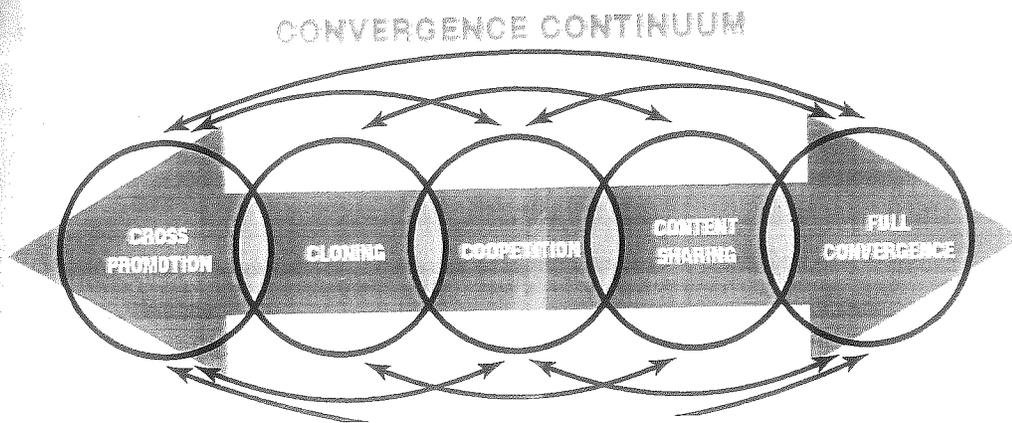
man and CEO from 1990 to 2005, “the best way to ensure the production and delivery of strong local news is to allow companies like ours to practice good journalism across various media platforms. Convergence brings together the depth of newspaper coverage, the immediacy of television, and the interactivity of the web.”<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps one of the most referenced definitions of media convergence was introduced in 2003, when researchers Larry Dailey, Lori Demo, and Mary Spillman proposed the Convergence Continuum, a heuristic model for studying practices in the newsroom.<sup>2</sup> They argue that a single model for convergence does not exist. Rather, convergence occurs at five stages: cross-promotion, cloning, competition, content sharing, and full convergence. The continuum has since been used as the foundation for several research projects that have addressed the degree to which media convergence is practiced across news organizations.

One reason that media convergence has come to mean different things to different people is because perception of it largely depends on whether the focus is on the institutional aspects of convergence or the convergence of content. The original intent of media convergence was not necessarily to improve journalistic storytelling. In fact, convergence was first conceived as a way to improve the bottom line.

In the early days of convergence, many predicted that the “backpack journalist” was the key to the future. After all, if we have one person who can write stories, take pictures, and shoot video on location for a single story, we can roll three jobs into one. But, as noted in Chapter 1, that concept didn’t exactly thrive or become widely adopted. However, there are individuals out there who excel at more than one form of storytelling and those who specialize in one area of storytelling.

Regardless, multimedia story production requires that we all understand how story forms outside our areas of expertise are created. If you are a brilliant photographer, for example, you do not necessarily have to be the best writer. But you do need to be proficient and know how different kinds of written pieces are constructed. You need to understand the mechanics of good writing and grammar. And perhaps most important, you need to be able to collaborate with writers who will help develop multimedia stories. The most specialized of the aforementioned professions such as videography, photography, design, and graphics reporting require both heightened technical and visual abilities. Of course, writers don’t need to know how to illustrate and animate an interactive graphic. However, in the very least, writers (and others) must know what types of information graphics are available, when they are best used, how they fit into a multimedia package, and what types of information must be gathered to make them viable.

**FIGURE 2-4**

Cross-promotion includes the least amount of cooperation and interaction among members of different news organizations. At this level, media outlets promote the content of their partners through the use of words or visual elements.

Cloning is the practice of one partner republishing the other partner's product with little editing (e.g., content from a newspaper is displayed on a TV partner's website). At this level, outlets do not discuss their news gathering plans and share content only after a story has been completed.

Cooperation is the stage at which news outlets both cooperate and compete. Staff members of separate media outlets promote and share information about some stories. One entity also might produce some content for its partner.

Content sharing occurs when a media outlet regularly (but not always) shares information gathered by its cross-media partner and publishes it after it has been repackaged. Partners also might share news budgets or attend the partner's planning sessions. Collaboration on a special, investigative, or enterprise piece is possible.

Full convergence is the stage at which partners cooperate in both gathering and disseminating the news. Their common goal is to use the strengths of the different media to tell the story in the most effective way. Under full convergence, hybrid teams of journalists from partnering organizations work together to plan, report, and produce a story, deciding along the way which parts of the story are told most effectively in print, broadcast, and digital forms.

## Knowing Your Craft and Collaborating with Others

Historically, journalism and communications programs at universities have focused on training writers, designers, photographers, on-air reporters, and videographers separately. Of course, most programs trained everyone to respect the roles of others in a general sense. However, in the past, students were encouraged to focus specifically on one area of communications/journalism and pursue jobs accordingly. For example, individuals who gravitated toward writing were encouraged to become reporters for newspapers or magazines. Videographers or individuals interested in reporting on air were encouraged to go into broadcast journalism and eventually

landed at television or radio stations. And visual journalists, like designers, photographers, and graphics reporters, often gravitated toward print.

However, with the rise of media convergence and the attention most news organizations now give to their web products, a number of notable journalism programs have dramatically revamped curricula. Now, many communications majors focus on all areas of study—from writing and reporting to photojournalism and graphic design. They also emphasize the importance of multimedia storytelling and cross-platform publication (i.e., print, broadcast, online, mobile, etc.). For example, in 2007, the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University—widely considered to be one of the premiere programs of its kind—launched the “Medill 2020” curriculum. According to Medill dean John Lavine, “Most important for Medill students who will enter the media and marketing worlds between now and 2020—those who will get the best jobs—not only will know how to find and tell a high-impact story but also how to do it in new forms and on new platforms that better engage their audiences.”<sup>3</sup> Similar curriculum revisions have occurred at Ball State University, the University of Florida, the University of Missouri, and the University of North Carolina, to name a few. And a number of new multimedia programs around the world have begun to surface at both liberal arts and technical schools.

This shift in priorities has caught on at some institutions more quickly than others. Of course every school structures its programs and approaches multimedia differently. However, the primary theme is pretty clear: more than ever, communications professionals must be adept at producing content for multiple platforms. Some will do so as backpack journalists. Others will still specialize and collaborate. But it is no longer enough to simply respect what your coworkers from different disciplines do. Rather, you must speak a common language that allows you to fully conceptualize stories with all forms of storytelling in mind. For example, reporters who primarily focus on writing must also be able to think visually, spot graphics potential in stories, and know when video or photos are appropriate.

Likewise, photographers must be able to collect video and still images. Graphics reporters must conduct field research, write text for graphics packages and interactives, and edit photos for galleries and slide shows. And, more than ever, we must all understand how to work together in ways that make the story more meaningful.

Multimedia pioneer Don Wittekind was one of the first working journalists to lead multimedia teams when he was the informational graphics director at the South Florida *Sun-Sentinel*. Under his direction, the *Sun-Sentinel* published

its first interactive project in December of 1996 and continued as an industry leader throughout his tenure. But Wittekind says when they first started focusing on multimedia, there was no collaboration at all.

"We would take the photos and other assets and just build what we wanted in graphics, and everyone was happy. We even did our own voiceover work, which was not a good idea," he said. The "big change," came when Wittekind asked the *Sun-Sentinel* radio partner if they could recommend someone to record the narration for a story about Aids in the Caribbean. They agreed and suggested a part-time employee from Jamaica as the voice.

"The difference was HUGE," Wittekind said. "Suddenly we had not just a professional voice, but one from the area we were covering. It was perfect. That was the day I really understood just how I was limiting our work by keeping it all in graphics and I was a believer in collaboration. After that, I stole resources (I mean collaborated) from every other department and news partner as often as they were willing."<sup>4</sup>

From that point on, multimedia teams at the *Sun-Sentinel* have been based on the individual stories at hand. For each project, a reporter, photographer, story editor, and a couple of graphics reporters are normally staples on each team. And depending on the subject, the team might also have a videographer and radio writer to work on the script and voiceover. This team collectively brainstorms, reports, and builds the project, with each team member working within his or her area of expertise. Once the story is published, the group is disbanded and a new team built for the next story.

Of course, talking and writing about the importance of collaboration are easy because few would argue that collaboration isn't important...in theory. Teaching collaboration, however, is a bit trickier. Different people have different ways of communicating ideas. So, there is no guarantee that the communication styles of individuals will mesh. You can bring two equally talented and hard-working individuals together in a team. Yet, if one is more aggressive and talkative, while the other is shy and reserved, the team dynamic can quickly be threatened. Although neither personality trait is wrong, the individuals in this collaborative environment may have trouble effectively navigating group and interpersonal communication.

Part of being a good collaborator has more to do with diplomacy than anything else. Getting along with others often has less to do with how nice or accommodating you are and more to do with your ability to adapt. Good communicators often work hard to assess someone else's personality and then adapt communication styles accordingly. For example, I am pretty cheerful, energetic

and open to others' ideas. But I also tend to be pretty straightforward, no-nonsense, thick-skinned, and maybe even a little too blunt for my own good. I don't think I am hard to get along with. In fact, most of my collaborative efforts have been pretty successful. But, I think that is at least partially the result of a lot of effort on my part to read the personality traits and work habits of my cocollaborators. Sometimes, your partners will need and want you to cut the bull and get to the point. Other times, your interactions may require more delicacy because your partners may be shier, quieter, or more reserved in demeanor. However, when a teammate has a dramatically different personality or way of working, a common response is to dismiss or criticize him for his differences. But remember that most of the time, an individual's personality has little to do with his or her potential to do good work. We may not want to hang out and have a beer with everyone we collaborate with. But for the sake of the story, we do need to respect them and find common ground. A good leader and teammate tries to effectively communicate with her partners and navigate differing personalities and viewpoints in ways that encourage everyone to do their best work.

## Best Practices in Collaboration

Saying that you understand what makes for good collaboration and actually playing well with others are two different concepts. In fact, if we polled 100 people randomly and asked them to provide tips for effective collaboration, the resulting list would probably look much like the one provided in the next section. But, when push comes to shove (and hopefully it wouldn't really come to that!) it is probably also safe to say that not all of those 100 individuals would collaborate well. In fact, if forced to be honest, you might have to admit that sometimes, you let your pride get the better of you or don't always work well with others in collaborative situations. So, although this section may seem like common sense, it is never a bad idea to revisit three fundamental rules for effective collaboration.

**Rule No. 1.** Remember that disagreeing with someone about the way a story should come together does not have to be contentious. In fact, a healthy dose of disagreement can be good for your growth as a journalist and for the growth of the story. Disagreement, is different from disrespect. So, try to value all opinions, even if you do not agree with them. Also remember that just because someone disagrees with

**QUICK TIPS**

Follow these steps for healthy, efficient collaboration.

1. Identify team members and their skill sets. Make sure everyone knows what everyone else is good at.
2. Appoint a project manager.
3. Conduct a brainstorming meeting that includes everyone on the team.
4. Clearly define the story.
5. Use a story planning form that helps the group stay on task and assess multimedia potential.
6. Clearly define the responsibilities of each team member. Make sure that everyone knows what everyone else is doing.
7. Establish intermediate and final deadlines for content.
8. Establish a clear workflow. How will communication occur? How and where will files be named and stored?
9. Check in with the project manager and teammates frequently during reporting.
10. Keep an eye out for information that might help your teammates. Even if information isn't relevant to your piece of the story, it may be relevant to one of the others.

you doesn't mean he can't understand you. Avoid talking down to your partners, patronizing them, or implying they are stupid for disagreeing with you. Right or wrong, you won't get very far in collaborative environments by being disrespectful.

**Rule No. 2.** Make sure that everyone has an opportunity to express opinions. Believe it or not, this is not necessarily about making everyone feel good. In fact, if we are all doing this for the right reasons, our feelings are irrelevant. This rule is about making sure the story is the best that it can be. Part of the benefit of bringing more than one brain to the table is the value added by a diversity of thoughts, ideas, and perspectives. Likewise, different team members will have different areas of expertise. Thus,

it is important that each teammate explain his or her views on how the story should be represented through their respective medium. Photographers need to weigh in on the best way to tell the story through photos. Graphics reporters need to assess the story's graphics potential. And writers and videographers should weigh in on the story's narrative arc and the best way to capture it in words or video. So make sure all those views are laid on the table at the start of a project and revisit those views from time to time as the project progresses.

**Rule No. 3.** Understand that not everyone is going to be happy all the time. Or as our moms often tell us, choose your battles wisely. Yes, we need to make sure all ideas are represented, but when opinions differ, there will have to be compromise so the project can move forward. Sometimes your ideas will survive, and other times, they won't make it past the brainstorming phase. You have to be okay with this. Of course, fight for what you think is right and always do so with the best interests of the story in mind. But, know when to back down and be supportive of the concepts that do survive. A team player puts his best foot forward, even when he does not agree with the majority opinion.

And beyond these to basic guidelines, there exist a few other rules of the road that will help ensure a smooth workflow:

**Rule No. 4.** **Always focus.** There is a huge difference between a topic and a story. And, for any given topic, there are probably hundreds of possible stories within. For example, "breast cancer" is a topic. Saying you want to do a story about breast cancer is like saying you want to snack on a 16-ounce steak. There are an infinite number of stories you can do about breast cancer. Some are attached to a timely event, such as the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure. Others could focus on informing women about risks, symptoms, and treatment. Some stories may illuminate one person's fight with the disease. Others may chronicle medical milestones in the fight against breast cancer. But, one thing is for certain: if you do not clearly define your story before diving into the collaborative process, you could end up with a mess on your hands. Add multiple team members, story forms, deadlines, and ideas about focus, and you could have a recipe for disaster. A true story will never have a chance to surface because you never found a clear, concise focus. Thus, every person on the team must have a clear understanding and shared vision for the project.

**Assign a project manager.** When I think about some of the more challenging collaborative teams I have been a part of, two phrases instantly come to mind: "too

many cooks in the kitchen”; and “too many generals, not enough soldiers.” That is not to say one team member’s role is more important than the others. But when dealing with several collaborators—all with different skills and areas of expertise—as well as several types of content, one person should be in charge of keeping track of it all. This project manager’s most important jobs are to facilitate communication among team members and try to keep track of where everything stands during the process. The project manager should be organized and in regular contact with team members, chart progress, trouble shoot, and maintain the project timeline.

**Log in early and often.** Team members should come together early in the story planning process to define the story and brainstorm a multimedia presentation. Try to isolate all of the different story forms and assess the multimedia potential for a story in an organized methodical fashion.

**Clearly define responsibilities.** Once a project manager has been appointed, the story’s focus established, and multimedia potential assessed, make sure that each team member is clear on his or her responsibilities. If the team makes these decisions collectively, individuals are more likely to be satisfied with their roles and feel obligated to cooperate.

**Establish a schedule for the reporting process.** Whenever possible, set deadlines as a team. Make sure team members know that everyone will depend on them to meet deadlines. Likewise, set deadlines together so that everyone can be held accountable. At the same time, understand that deadlines and focus may need to be adjusted as the reporting process evolves. If a piece you are responsible for needs to be modified, make sure your teammates are aware of changes so they can adjust accordingly.

**Agree on a common workflow.** Determine who will be responsible for editing and reviewing content to ensure accuracy and consistency.

**Develop a file management system.** Make sure everyone is clear on the necessary file sizes and other technical requirements. Determine where files will be saved and what the naming convention will be. Taking a few minutes to do this early in the process could save hours of confusion later.

**Communicate your progress with teammates throughout the reporting process.** Aside from the times you meet to discuss the big picture plan, you will

spend most of your time working independently. Because of this, it becomes easy to forget your responsibilities to the team. But if you want the process to go smoothly and the final product to be close to what you initially discussed, you have to keep lines of communication open. Make sure your teammates know how your end of the story is progressing, when you encounter roadblocks, and if it becomes necessary to make changes to your approach. Keep an eye out for information that is relevant to pieces your teammates are working on. Missed opportunities are often the result of miscommunication. While you are out in the field, reporting and gathering information, you may encounter content that is not relevant to the piece you are working on but that could help one of your teammates. For example, if you are writing a text-based story and you encounter a scene that would make for great photos or an information graphic, share that information with the photographer, videographer, or graphics reporter. Always be respectful of your teammates and their opinions. You do not have to agree with everyone all the time. And you certainly don't have to sit back and let someone have his way when you don't agree with his approach. But remember that you can't have it your way all the time. Also, try to avoid turf wars. In other words, make sure that every time you find yourself in conflict with a teammate that you are arguing a point for the good of the story, not in defense of your craft. The story should always come first, and sometimes, that will mean stepping back and letting someone else take the lead.

## Developing a Workflow

Different stories require different methods for teamwork. In some cases, team members need to be physically close to one another during reporting and production. For example, a writer and graphics reporter may choose to work together on an interactive graphic. The reporter can contribute to the research and written pieces, whereas the graphics reporter focuses on illustration and animation. However, for this collaboration to be effective, there will be a point at which the two must sit side-by-side in front of a computer. Together, they can effectively put all the pieces together and make sure they both agree on storytelling and functionality. Other times, teams can work remotely and pull things together with limited face time. E-mail is great for sharing information and drafts of your work. Furthermore, many online content

management systems allow team members to remotely upload content to a final site. But regardless of your chosen workflow, establishing solid workflow is as important to collaboration as getting along with one another throughout the process. Likewise, establishing that workflow can help you avoid conflicts later.

Once a team has been established, quickly negotiate the processes you will follow through story development. How often will you meet? What steps will you take to collaboratively brainstorm parts of the story? How and when will you provide feedback to one another? How will you store and manage digital files? Is there a need to divide the larger team into smaller groups of collaborators? If so, what will those teams look like? And, perhaps most important: What expectations do you have for yourself and others in your team? Collaboratively answering these questions up front is important for several reasons.

First, it will naturally lead to a workflow plan. In addition to multiple collaborators, your project will include multiple media files and often several file types. Establishing a workflow with everyone onboard is essential to keeping track of the people and the content that will comprise your project. Second, answering these questions up front will also help the team set realistic deadlines that everyone feels obligated to make. The more you clearly communicate your expectations, the more likely each team member will feel obligated to rise to the occasion. Meeting deadlines is important to getting the project done on time and ensuring that the story is coming together the way you all envisioned. Likewise, if you find things are not coming together like you originally planned, meeting intermediate deadlines can give you an opportunity to reassess and change direction if necessary.

When you are good at it, collaboration can be one of the most satisfying parts of our jobs. Of course we all know that collaboration is not always easy. Personality clashes, scheduling conflicts, differing opinions about the direction a story should take, turf wars, and resource limitations are all potential roadblocks to smooth collaboration. And even the best collaborators sometimes find themselves wondering why they didn't just "do it all themselves" to avoid the hassles associated with depending on others. However, take it from someone who has made a career out of leading collaborative projects. There is nothing more gratifying than seeing a piece come together that showcases the work of a team of talented collaborators. When successful, multimedia collaboration often results in well-rounded, rich narratives that capture stories with a level of depth and variety that is unmatched.



## Professional Perspective

**Miranda Mulligan** • Multimedia Presentation Editor

**The Boston Globe**

*Miranda Mulligan is the design director for BostonGlobe.com and Boston.com, the websites for The Boston Globe. She is a multimedia designer and educator with over ten years of professional experience in print design, photography, and information graphics reporting.*

*Her work has received awards from the Online News Association, Virginia Press Association, the National Press Photographers Association, and the Society for News Design.*

Anyone. Anywhere. Tracking Meghan Landowski's Killer

<http://hamptonroads.com/2010/03/tracking-meghan-landowskis-killer>

Reporter: Janie Bryant

Video reporting: Brian Clark (with court video from Steve Earley)

Video story editing: Brian Clark and Miranda Mulligan

Interactivity: Miranda Mulligan

For months in 2008, investigators gathered every Tuesday in a nondescript conference room to strategize their hunt for 16-year-old Meghan Landowski's killer. Her murder went unsolved for six months while fear grew in a southeast Virginia community. And the police waited until the murderer pleaded guilty and a judge sentenced him to 42 years in prison to talk about the investigation that began with a 911 call on April 10, 2008. Reporter Janie Bryant had been chipping away at every angle of the story since the start, and the portion that would explain the investigation was finally scheduled to run in *The Virginian-Pilot's Sunday Magazine* section in the middle of March 2010.

Two weeks before the run date, video wiz Brian Clark asked me to swing by his desk. Over time and several multimedia projects, he and I had developed good communication about stories we thought might have alternative story form potential. In other words, when I came across a story to which video could add depth, or when he ran into a story that could make for an interesting interactive piece, we tried to team up. So collaboration was not a foreign term in our books.

Clark had just returned from collecting video interviews with both of the key detectives. He and Bryant interviewed each detective for about an hour—a rare opportunity. The detectives preferred to avoid video interviews, but Bryant had

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The Virginian-Pilot • March 15, 2010

## ANYONE. ANYWHERE.

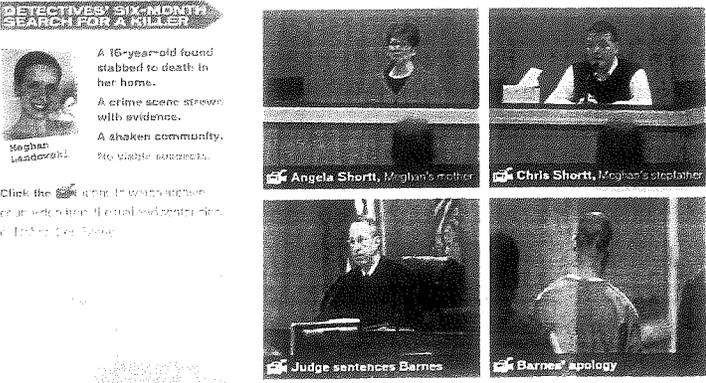
DETECTIVES' SIX-MONTH SEARCH FOR A KILLER

**Meghan Landowski**

A 16-year-old found stabbed to death in her home.  
A crime scene strewn with evidence.  
A shaken community.  
No viable suspects.

Click the **video** icon to watch a video or **photo** icon to view a photo. If you'd like to print this article, click the **print** icon.

[investigative timeline](#) [court video](#) [about this project](#)



**RETURN THE INVESTIGATION**

A CASE that began with a 16-year-old girl, Meghan Landowski, was pushed, and pushed some more. By the time they sat down with the detectives, she could zone in on their stories and what they went through.

“The transcript of the video had already been entered into evidence, and police knew we could FOIA [Freedom of Information Act] the video and the 911 tape,” Bryant said. “So they sat down with the family ahead of time and went through what they were giving us. The family wanted it made public. I believe police did, too. Even after Barnes pleaded guilty, there were some who still said it could not have been him. I think they wanted people to see for themselves the story he told them and how he told it.”

Both Clark and Bryant are seasoned journalists. But Bryant was motivated by the demands of her print story, and those of the video story burdened Clark. Bryant

FIGURE 2-6

The simple design structure is maintained throughout the multimedia piece, “Anyone, Anywhere.” Top-level navigation is always present, allowing the users to navigate through the package in a nonlinear fashion.

Source: Image courtesy of *The Virginian-Pilot*

pushed, and been patient, and pushed some more. By the time they sat down with the detectives, she could zone in on their stories and what they went through.

“The transcript of the video had already been entered into evidence, and police knew we could FOIA [Freedom of Information Act] the video and the 911 tape,” Bryant said. “So they sat down with the family ahead of time and went through what they were giving us. The family wanted it made public. I believe police did, too. Even after Barnes pleaded guilty, there were some who still said it could not have been him. I think they wanted people to see for themselves the story he told them and how he told it.”

Both Clark and Bryant are seasoned journalists. But Bryant was motivated by the demands of her print story, and those of the video story burdened Clark. Bryant

admitted she had never conducted an interview for a video, and she had never done an interview with a videographer present. These were both aspects of this collaborative process that led to some challenges.

In preparation, Clark asked Bryant to say as little as possible while the camera was recording. Clark preferred to conduct the interview because he had more experience with interviewing for on-camera content. He was anticipating that Bryant would use traditional interview techniques to keep the subjects talking. For example, Bryant might have asked questions that begged shorter more concise answers; she might have used encouraging “yeahs” and “uh-huhs”—reassuring sounds to keep them talking. Or she might have even talked straight through an answer. While these are great techniques for conducting a print interview, they can be disastrous for the overall audio and video quality.

Conversely, Bryant was concerned that allowing someone else to conduct the interview could be a detriment to the story that would run in print. She said, “I had waited so long to get to police and now I was afraid I wouldn’t be able to relax and neither would they.” Because compromise is an essential ingredient to all collaboration, Clark decided to take a backseat and worry about how to shape the video story during the editing part of the production process. Although in Clark’s opinion this wasn’t an ideal approach, he decided to accommodate his teammate’s concerns.

It is also important to understand that when they were collecting interviews, neither Clark nor Bryant knew yet how the multimedia story would come together from information gathering to publication. And the detectives agreed to give video interviews only one day before the meetings, giving Clark and Bryant only a short time to prepare. In an ideal process, we would have talked about the multimedia story prior to the interviews to, in the very least, develop a rough storyboard and shot list. This helps ensure all assets are collected during the reporting process and prevents the team from wishing we had gotten other material afterward. However, in this case, time constraints meant the team had to work quickly with less preparation on the front end.

After he returned from the police department, I stopped by Clark’s desk to chat. He wanted to know if there was potential for an interactive feature instead of the more typical storytelling treatment: a tightly edited video. I couldn’t say, “yes!” fast enough.

In general, crime investigations lend themselves to good storytelling. This case of a 16-year-old high school sophomore killed in her family’s home in an other-

wise quiet neighborhood had tremendous public interest from the beginning. Then, police finally made an arrest and it turned out to be a former classmate—a 16-year-old boy, so talented and studious that half the community could not believe he was the killer.

Over the next two days, Clark and I went through the raw footage to develop a rough storyboard so that I could try to sell the multimedia idea to the editors. As we logged the video, Clark and I didn't always agree. There was a sound bite here or there that I liked, but he didn't, and vice versa. In the end, however, we found a story that could be divided into four basic parts: video interviews, court videos, an interactive timeline and a section about the project. All in all, we would have a nice interactive feature.

Later the same afternoon, the editors, director of photography, Clark, and I talked in depth about whether we should publish the story with so much detail. The story had the potential to be quite explicit, as the crime scene was very bloody, Barnes' video interview footage was eerie, and the victim and then suspect were teenagers. After a much-needed discussion, deliberation, and inevitable disagreement, we decided that the video made for a powerful story and publishing it would be an essential service to our readers.

It took Clark about a week to log and cut back the interview and crime scene footage into a compelling narrative arc. It was a complicated story, and he was disseminating interview footage that had been conducted by a traditional, print-minded reporter. While Clark worked on the video components, I set out to find the remaining assets that I would need for the interactive narrative. I worked with assistant urban team editor Matthew Roy on putting together a condensed timeline of the case. I located the previously published court and sentencing video; and I developed a design for the interactive feature that would eventually house all of the other assets.

Once the video story was in place, Clark and I met with editors one more time. This gave us an opportunity to change the direction of the story if necessary or get a blessing to proceed. Although it is often frustrating to have a change in direction this far along in the process, it does happen. The most important thing is to choose your battles wisely. Although our editors agreed with the general focus of the video narrative, there were a few disagreements about presentation. For example, editor Denis Finley thought it was important to publish the full 13-minute video without breaking it into chunks. I worried about the attention spans of online viewers. In the end, we compromised, and I agreed to present both options to users.

## WHAT WE LEARNED

Every new multimedia project comes with different challenges and new ideas. Each time, it's a good idea to sum up the two or three things you learned from the process. Not only will this help you with your next project, but also it will address ways to communicate and collaborate better in the future. This project highlighted three important points:

**TIP #1** Think about process when collaborating with others. You can anticipate obstacles and adjust your workflow if necessary.

**TIP #2** Talk about multimedia potential in stories early and often! Don't wait until the last minute unless it you can't avoid it.

**TIP #3** Don't be afraid to dream big when suggesting presentation ideas. Likewise, don't be afraid to scale back the presentation in accordance with your resources.

Following this meeting, Clark worked through notes, cleaned up transitions and made some adjustments to the audio tracks. He uploaded the individual videos into our video client and I pulled them into the interactive.

Over the next two days, I finished the design elements and produced the Flash interactive. We chose to publish the multimedia at PilotOnline.com on a Monday to take advantage of a peak traffic day. The print version ran in the paper the day before. The end result was so much richer than a traditional text and picture story presentation. We provided the audience with a much deeper story and answered more of their questions through the multimedia piece. We brought them into the interviews. Multimedia allowed readers to see and hear the detectives and Robert Barnes in a way they could not by reading the text alone. One of the registered users commented on the story: "This gave me insight into the hard work these detectives did in solving this heart breaking and brutal murder. I'll be extra sure to hug my kids tonight."

During this process, we all continued to complete our day-to-day tasks. We were not relieved of our routines and daily obligations to the newspaper and online products. We worked around our normal responsibilities, finding pockets of time here and there to finish this project. And, our diligence seems to have paid off.

The interactive feature was very popular compared to other interactive features on PilotOnline.com and HamptonRoads.com. The first-month page views were nearly twice the average for other interactive features. The first-week video play counts for both the chunked video and the 13-minute version were nearly three times the average for similar stories. And the shorter chunked videos were played to completion more often than the 13-minute version of the story.

The only way we have been able to produce interactive narratives like this one is through collaboration. For example, over the past couple of years, Clark and I have developed a mutual trust because we not only respect opposing opinions; we often seek them out to help inform our own decisions. And, we practice compromise for the sake of the story. Because telling the best story with the available resources is at the heart of all of our storytelling decisions, it is easier to work together. We take ownership of each story as a team.

Put together a team of three to five of your classmates, each with differing skill sets. Try to make sure your team has at least one writer, one photographer, one videographer, and one graphics reporter or programmer. Identify a potential multimedia story and conduct an initial brainstorming meeting. As outlined in this chapter, make sure to address the following:

1. Clearly define the story.
2. Appoint a project manager. This person should run the meeting and take notes.
3. Develop a storytelling strategy and delegate responsibilities.
4. Set realistic deadlines for all parts of the project.
5. Determine how you will manage files as they are submitted.

After your initial brainstorming meeting, write a three- to five-page project outline that includes a one-paragraph description of the story, a concrete plan for storytelling that includes the types of multimedia pieces that will be produced and who will produce them, a clear deadline summary, and a summary of where files should be saved when they are complete. Post your outline on your WordPress site.