

YouCommNews.com is a digital media industry innovation aimed at growing news and public affairs journalism, using the capabilities of the internet to crowd-source both story ideas and resources.

YouCommNews uses a website to enable members of the public to commission the stories they want to see. The website allows the direct funding of journalism by the public without the necessary involvement of traditional media organisations. Story ideas “pitched” on the site by Journalists may attract funding towards their completion, while stories “suggested” by members of the public can attract support and consequently lead to further investigation by one of our registered Journalists. The resulting stories will then be available for publication in mainstream, independent and online media, either freely or through the sale of publication rights.

YouCommNews is:

- ◆ An experimental business model for supporting and growing news and public affairs journalism in the broadband environment;
- ◆ An industry innovation aimed at harnessing the social networking abilities of the internet, and;
- ◆ An industry training mechanism, in which final year journalism students and graduates can gain experience and skills within a media organization – an answer to the disappearance of the traditional “cadetship” training model.

The central innovation behind YouCommNews is using the web to bring audience members and journalists together in collaboration.

Background

YouCommNews is an initiative of the Public Interest Journalism Foundation, based at Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne. The website was officially launched on the 3rd of September 2010 at the New News Conference on the future of journalism.

YouCommNews is unique in Australia. Some media organisations, particularly the ABC, have talked about providing media professionals to assist community members to tell their own stories (for example, the ABC Open project). However, no media organisation has taken the step of placing control of the commissioning process in the hands of the audience.

To do so is both a necessary and a potentially ground breaking innovation, given that the main impact of disruptive new media technologies is to transfer power from traditional gatekeepers of legacy media to audience members.

There is, however, a relevant model in the United States of America for this innovation. Spot.Us has been operating in the Bay area of San Francisco for just over a year, a project of the not for profit Centre for Media Change, funded in part by the Knight Foundation. Over its first year of operation, It has “crowd-sourced” the funding of 35 stories, and has recently completed its first collaboration with the New York Times. It has recently expanded to Seattle and San Francisco. YouCommNews is in close contact with Spot.Us and is based on its community funded reporting model.

There are currently 48 members of the public, 61 Journalists and 8 Publishers/Broadcasters registered as users on YouCommNews. Since its launch the website has attracted more than 2000 page views and over 20 donations towards the funding of story pitches.

It is anticipated that YouCommNews will develop to do stories of local, national and international importance. However, the point of the exercise is that the type of stories commissioned will be in the hands of the audience. Increased understanding of the kind of journalism different communities – whether geographic or of interest - seek and are prepared to fund will be one of the outcomes of this project.

How will YouCommNews work?

The Pitch

The website is used to “pitch” and leverage support for story ideas. Any user or organisation registered with YouCommNews can pitch or suggest a story idea. The Public Interest Journalism Committee of the Foundation reserves the right to reject any pitch. The grounds for rejection will include:

- ◆ Pitches that would involve journalism contrary to the public interest, or the values and mission statement of the Foundation.
- ◆ Pitches that would involve journalism in contravention of the Journalists’ Code of Ethics or the principles of the Australian Press Council.
- ◆ Pitches which, in the judgment of the Board, are trivial, impractical or unrealistic. ©2009 PIJMO
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Registration

There are three levels of registration with YouCommNews.

- ◆ **Public Registration:** Brings with it the right to suggest story pitches, and to contribute to the funding of story pitches. Anyone may register as a public member through the website.
- ◆ **Journalist Registration:** Brings with it the right to submit story pitches, and to be commissioned by YouCommNews to undertake work on funded pitches. Journalist registrants must agree to abide by the values of the Foundation and terms of YouCommNews, the Journalists’ code of ethics and the principles of the Australian Press Council. Journalists must provide their full name and email address. They will be invited to submit details of their experience and samples of previous work to be publicly displayed next to pitches. The Foundation reserves the right to reject applications for registration as a journalist.
- ◆ **Publishers and Broadcasters registration:** Brings with it the right to submit story pitches. Publishers and Broadcasters are also the only registrants who are permitted to fund more than 20 per cent of the cost of doing a story. If a Publisher or Broadcaster funds more than 50 per cent of a story, it can opt to receive first publication rights. Other rights, including exclusive rights, may be available through negotiation with the Foundation. Publishers and Broadcasters registering with YouCommNews must agree to abide by the values of the Foundation, and the Journalists’ code of ethics and the principles of the Australian Press Council. In order to register as a Publisher or Broadcaster registrants must demonstrate to the Board that they have the ability and capacity to publish or broadcast material, whether in print publications, by broadcasting or online. Unconventional media and new media organizations, including community broadcasters, bloggers and others, are encouraged to apply. The Foundation reserves the right to reject applications for registration as a Publisher or Broadcaster.

Funding

Registrants may fund individual stories on YouCommNews. Donations must be of \$20 or more, and can be made on the site through PayPal or credit card.

If a pitch fails to get the required amount of funding for the journalism to proceed, donors to that pitch will receive a refund in the form of site ‘credits’ which can then be used towards another pitch.

If a media organisation successfully negotiates to buy the rights to a pitch that has been funded by the public, members of the public may receive a full or partial refund in the form of site credits, which can then be used to support other pitches. Media organisations purchasing exclusive rights to a story must exercise these rights by publishing within a time period to be negotiated. Failure to publish within this time period will result in the story reverting to open source. ©2009 PIJMO **P11**

All funding received through the YouCommNews pitches will be used for the journalism. The administrative costs of the Foundation will be met from other funding.

The Journalism

Journalists working for YouCommNews will be paid at a rate negotiated in advance when the project is pitched, with the starting point for negotiations being the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance freelance rate card.

The journalism will be supervised by the Public Interest Journalism committee, which will report and make recommendations to the Board. The PIJ committee may appoint an editor to a project.

Training and Cadetships

At the discretion of the PIJ committee, journalists working with YouCommNews may be assigned a student or cadet journalist to act as a research assistant. Journalists commissioned by YouCommNews are expected to assist in providing guidance and work experience for any students assigned to them.

Publication

Unless other arrangements have been negotiated with a media organisation, journalism done by YouCommNews commissioned journalists will be published on the YouCommNews site, and will be available for publication by anyone who wishes to use it. YouCommNews and its journalists reserve their moral rights. This means that the journalism must not be altered, cut or manipulated without the consent of YouCommNews and the relevant journalist.