

Media gets its mojo on

People everywhere are using mobile devices to tell their own stories, and the media industry is having to adapt. **Ivo Burum** explains this brave new world of mojo

Louis Kantilla from remote Bathurst Island is part of a new breed of digital storyteller – a mojo (mobile journalist), able to record, edit and upload stories from almost anywhere using only a smartphone. “Editing this stuff with this little gadget you can do it by your hands, maybe you can go out fishing and do editing while you throw [in] the line. You can do anything with this,” he says.

This new form of do-anything-from-anywhere mobile storytelling is part of a communications revolution. Author and media commentator Robert McChesney believes the combination of social media and powerful new technology has created a “critical juncture” that’s challenging existing communications institutions. It’s transforming people like Louis, who once were the audience, into producers of user generated content (UGC) for a new online news and information market.

The possibilities for a mobile-led communication revolution have never been greater. In the final quarter of 2011, more iPhones were sold than babies were born – an iPhone left an Apple retailer every 4.2 seconds compared to one baby born every 4.6 seconds. In 2012, Android mobile devices are outselling the iPhone two to one. In 30 of the top 60 mobile-using countries, there are more active mobiles than people.

With more than two billion smartphones now in use, each with more processing power than NASA had at its disposal when it landed a man on the moon, it’s no wonder that nearly 40 per cent of new mobile users are going mobile only.

These days the first person at a news scene will probably have a mobile device they’ll use to file a citizen witness report. But chances are, they won’t be a journalist. Internet critic Andrew Keen calls these citizens “amateur monkeys”, who in 2011 created a whopping 31 million hours of what he calls “gossip” – enough UGC to run 3500 channels 24/7 for a year.

But the journalism profession has been caught napping. With the number of citizens using mobiles online growing exponentially, mainstream media is only now beginning to teach its journalists the digital creation, aggregation and curating skills needed to sift through volumes of electronic online kludge.

It’s estimated that only 10 per cent of data on the internet is structured, or database driven. The other 90 per cent comprises



emails (500 billion per day), SMS (9.6 trillion messages in 2012), tweets (3000 per second), YouTube (72 hours of video uploaded every minute), Facebook (260 million people access Facebook via their mobile) and ad requests (over 400,000 every minute). As online communities find better ways to manage the volumes of online content, they will receive an even larger audience and a bigger slice of the advertising dollar pie.

At present, even though people spend 10 per cent of their media attention on mobiles, the mobile ad spend is still only 1 per cent of total ad spend. But with trends showing that 100 per cent of Japanese consumers who own mobiles make their first research for a purchase using their mobile, the advertising industry knows there is more mobile ad revenue to come.

These same mobile trends can be seen impacting the news business. With more people going online for their information, media companies are having to retool and reskill their workforce to capitalise on new online market opportunities. And even though large media organisations such as US newspaper publisher Gannett recently purchased 1200 iPhones for its journalists, in general, mainstream media has been slow to make the shift to mobile.

Illico Elia, head of mobile at UK advertising giant LBi, predicted the current trend almost a decade ago when he ran

Reuters mobile. Elia’s mojo project at Reuters enabled journalists to publish news stories from the field.

“The first reaction we got from the journalist is you want me to write, take photographs and interview someone, ask questions, take photos and video, so you are going to give me four times the salary... ‘no’. We said stick it in your back pocket and use it when you want to,” he recalls. “Without fail, after using the phone, journalists said ‘I get it now.’”

And today’s journalists get it as well. Recent mojo workshops I ran at *The Sydney Morning Herald* (SMH) and at *Ekstra Bladet* (EB), Denmark’s largest tabloid, saw journalists and photographers take to mojo as if their jobs depended on it.

“Our editor wanted another angle on the ‘summer weather’ so we went straight away on a little iPhone mission,” says Dan Rasmussen a senior journalist with EB. He made his first completely shot and edited on the iPhone story only a day after our mojo workshop. “Baby steps... but very inspiring.”

Online editors such as Simon Morris from SMH want journalists to use mobiles to upload raw video footage, or simple witness mojo, to sit alongside their online print stories. “We want it low res, we want it when it happens and we want to be the first with it online.”

Heine Jorgensen, the online editor from EB, also sees the benefit of having

Brendan, a mojo in the Northern Territory trained by Burum, shows local kids how to do it.
PHOTO: IVO BURUM

► journalists who remain in the field edit complete packages while they wait for the story to continue developing. “Sure, if they are on location and the story is breaking, they stay there. And we’d be mad not to take all they produce, raw footage and story.”

I call this “real mojo”. It involves more than uploading raw “accidental citizen witness footage” of riots to live websites like Bambuser, YouTube, or FTP (file transfer protocol) sites to be repackaged by news aggregators. It involves complete story creation, including an on-location edit, mix and upload using the mobile.

Smartphone accessibility is creating unprecedented opportunities for citizens like Louis, who live in remote communities, to engage in global conversations with, for example, the HuffPostLive. This is the Huffington Post’s new streaming venture designed to capitalise on mobiles’ anywhere, anytime capabilities.

Ahmed Shihab-Eldin, the new head of the HuffPostLive, believes that, “Truth, transparency and accountability should trump objectivity. The pursuit of as many angles and voices should replace this notion of getting one side’s perspective and disregarding countless others. Yet while we welcome multiple views on an event, what’s also needed is more than an accidental citizen witness view. Our segments will be as long or as short as they need to be to sustain the conversation,” says Shihab-Eldin.

But whether the Huff’s new venture evolves into a format that repackages

“I look forward to Louis and citizen mojos delivering their own stories from dinghies in remote streams and big ponds globally”



disparate and life-changing social online witness *moments* into a longer narrative, one that’s verified and structured, remains to be seen.

Alan Rusbridger, the editor of *The Guardian* in the UK, also believes accessing the “on the ground” mobile communicators is becoming more critical in the news business. He believes that to leave out the audience is to stop the story when it’s possibly only beginning.

“We’ve moved from an era in which a reporter writes a story and goes home and that’s the story written... the moment you press send on your story, the responses start coming in. And so I think journalists have to work out what to do about those responses... if you go along with open journalism, you’re going to be open to other sources,” he says.

One of those sources is primary and secondary schools that are embracing mojo practices across the curriculum. This is an example of Robert McChesney’s “critical juncture” at work, creating the foundations of a new “communication system that will be a powerful impetus (for) a more egalitarian, humane, sustainable, and creative (self-governing) society.”

Recently Jonathan Holmes, the host of ABC TV’s *Media Watch*, wrote in *The Walkley*

Magazine, “the program scratches an itch that no-one else can reach.” Probably true, especially with its current host.

But another way to scratch that itch might be to train young citizens to create and publish more representative stories, and in the principles of the fourth estate, even while still at school. Schools could achieve this by partnering with local media organisations in mojo type projects and training.

Whether it’s a Twitter feed, a Facebook post, a video on YouTube, accidental citizen witnessing or citizen journalism, people with disabilities telling their own stories, or Indigenous people creating a less marginalised voice, mobiles are playing a greater role in changing the way we communicate.

Whether it’s the Huff’s aggregated feed model, or Rusbridger’s new “open journalism newsroom”, the never-ending story created by millions of mobile contributors is challenging what news is, how and who makes it.

I look forward to the *Guardian*’s collective growing, to the HuffPostLive being a format that gives *citizen witnesses* an opportunity to become *citizen journalists*. I especially look forward to Louis and citizen mojos delivering their own stories from dinghies in remote streams and big ponds globally. Go mojo.

Ivo Burum is a journalist and former executive producer of factual for the ABC and was one of the pioneers of self-shot content creation in Australia, with series such as *Home Truths*, *Nurses* and *Race Around Oz*; www.burummedia.com.au

Congratulations to the
Walkley's Young Online
Journalist of the year.

august Digital Agency. Creative View. Proud sponsors of the 2012 Walkley Award for Best Young Online Journalist.
www.august.com.au Follow us on Twitter @augustco