

THE NEW NEWS²⁰¹²

RANKING CHICAGO'S ONLINE NEWS SCENE



PRODUCED BY



Community Media Workshop

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Find the online report at chicagonewnews.org

BY THOM CLARK

AFTER STUDYING CHICAGO'S ONLINE NEWS ECOSYSTEM FOR FOUR YEARS, THE COMMUNITY MEDIA WORKSHOP CAN SAY WITH CERTAINTY—NOTHING IS CERTAIN IN THE REALM OF ONLINE NEWS.

With release of *The NEW News 2012*, the Workshop returns to ranking online news and blog sites covering the city and its neighborhoods, and we have found a bit of a stalemate between legacy and new media sites. Daily newspaper, weekly business and public radio websites dominate the news scene in both audience and news coverage. Two Knight Foundation-supported online sites—Chi-Town Daily News and Windy Citizen (Chi-Town topped our rankings in 2009)—have come and gone. Another ambitious and well-connected site, Chicago News Cooperative, launched with great fanfare but shuttered its doors earlier this year.

It continues to be a turbulent time for the news business. Ethnic media still struggles in its transition to the web. Avid news consumers are getting almost all of their news online, on their phones or on iPads, spotlighting the slow death march of the printed daily. Local news is the name the game, but TribLocal found itself in a giant mess when it came to light that local suburban news was being outsourced overseas by contractor Journatic.

But how did we get here?

Three years ago, the Community Media Workshop published *The NEW News* to help Chicagoans discover where to find the journalism they want and need to make good decisions. In a rapidly evolving information economy—wherein legacy media (daily newspapers, network television) were losing readers, viewers and ad dollars to the free-flowing Internet—could citizens find the news and information that frame daily life in our city and region?

We discovered, as many feared, that local news coverage had been declining, for almost 20 years. We discovered some 200 local news sites of all shapes and size and ranked 60 of them for audience reach and local news coverage. And we talked with community leaders to discover where they were getting their news: enthralled by the rich choices the Internet now provided them on a daily basis, our focus groups expressed a yearning for more authoritative vetted news than the plethora of sites provided.

Two years ago in *The NEW News 2010*, we examined the operations of some 120 online news and blog sites to discover how Chicago's online innovators sustained their enterprises. We found many cookie-jar financed kitchen table labors of love,

including some sites that were amply supplementing daily news coverage by providing hyperlocal online news. But we also discovered a growing online audience of readers who were getting most of their information online from legacy media sites, particularly sites run by the *Chicago Tribune* and *Chicago Sun-Times*.

Today, alongside the prominent legacy sites on the web—testing the blend between hard news coverage, eye-attracting videos and photos, and celebrity-driven infotainment—are a feisty set of online-only sites attracting niche audiences at a growing pace. The communities served by these sites are getting more local coverage than ever before. There are still many coverage gaps, beyond the police blotter, among traditional under-covered neighborhoods beyond the police blotter, but the growth of smartphones and use of social media may be transforming even the way these neighbors now learn about what's going on in their communities. Indeed one shortcoming in our research design is the difficulty in measuring the impact of e-newsletters and listservs in collecting and spreading news and information among opt-in audiences in various communities. But what *NEW News 2012* tells us is that innovation is happening at the neighborhood level, and funders such as The Chicago Community Trust have tried to encourage that innovation and fill those gaps with programs such as the Local Reporting Project.

Research about the online news ecosystem is still in its infancy; after all, it's been around for less than a generation. As detailed in our methodology section, we've built on our past work and the research efforts of others in the field. Our goal is not to be offering awards to winners, but—like our popular *Getting On Air, Online & Into Print* media guide—to provide the news consumer with indicators about which sites are doing better. We have blended imperfect quantitative measures (traffic to large metro news sites tracks better than small sites covering one or two communities) with subjective qualitative measures (quality of coverage and community engagement). Our goal is to improve the quality of journalism by encouraging those who deliver our news today to use context, multiple sourcing and reader feedback in their reporting on our city and communities. We hope news consumers will discover ways to find the rest of the story, which no longer arrives as a single thump of rubber banded pulp on the front porch.

REPORT FINDINGS

BY EMILY CULBERTSON

The Community Media Workshop's third look at the local news scene reveals a changed media landscape, but perhaps not in the ways we anticipated. Many of the online news startups we featured in the first report (Chi-Town Daily News and Windy Citizen, for example) are gone, and legacy media outlets are continuing to find their way online. That said, many of the challenges facing local news that we noted in our first report (lack of diversity of voices in the news and lack of coverage in pressing issues) seem, in our review, to be persistent challenges facing the Chicago news ecosystem. We also see a great deal of variation in producing truly "online first" news. Some sites update breaking news regularly; other sites only republish the print, audio or video content primarily intended for offline distribution.

OUR FINDINGS

More online news outlets does not necessarily mean more varied news coverage.

Workshop reviewers noted a remarkable consistency in news judgment, particularly among citywide news websites and especially among television stations, which seem to draw from the same pool of headline news. Reviewers noted being "underwhelmed" by the lack of depth in city news, but noted that the Chicago Tribune's coverage of the Sikh temple shooting was a remarkable exception. Generally, few sites went out of their way to incorporate diverse perspectives into their news coverage, and the sites of daily newspapers still rise to the top for depth of coverage.

Investigative reporting helps city-wide news outlets stand out from each other.

Investigative reporting helped keep news organizations away from pack journalism, although some investigative reporting ("Is your manicure safe?") did not seem particularly useful.

Sites vary in their use of web and social media tools for storytelling.

Some sites were quite good at incorporating video, audio and appropriate photography into websites. Others relied upon stock art, which failed to add anything useful to the page. Likewise, many sites did not take advantage of hyperlinking to other

resources in their stories or keeping content up to date. Sites for TV stations and shows varied in their practices in providing written content to supplement video. Crain's use of Storify to capture Chick-Fil-A reactions stood out as a good use of online tools for storytelling.

Reader engagement with online news sites is infrequent, and where it exists, it is not of high quality.

While this is not entirely surprising—the number of commenters on a website is often a small fraction of its readership, and those participating tend to be passionate about issues—it was surprising to Workshop reviewers that most sites had few comments, while the ones that did sometimes tolerated uncivil remarks that might better have been moderated. Workshop reviewers said they wished that sites placed greater prominence on the voices of their readers and made better use of user-generated content, such as photography. Also, Workshop reviewers wished they saw more responsiveness from site operators or community managers to people commenting on their content on the site, Facebook or Twitter.

Innovation is happening on the neighborhood level.

The biggest diversity in sites, business models and news presentation is happening in neighborhood news, where online startups compete with weekly papers and efforts funded by foundations and nonprofits. Add to that innovation EveryBlock and the New Communities aggregator, and you see the most diversity in online news approaches in neighborhoods.

WBEZ stood out as a site that follows its own news judgment in a civic-minded way and uses the tools of the web well.

Although it was not the highest-ranking site in our report, the reviewers felt WBEZ showcases in-depth local reporting featuring diverse perspectives and does not solely follow the pack. Reporting incorporates video and pictures into the site better than many other sites. WBEZ also aggregates content from other sources well and features a "lively" stable of bloggers, making the online outlet not solely an adjunct of the broadcast, but a thriving independent source of news.

WHAT I READ

Based on quantitative and qualitative data, The NEW News 2012 rankings tell us where a lot of Chicagoans are headed online each day to get news about the city, their neighborhoods, specific issues and interests.

But where do individuals go, especially those people who are big-time consumers of news, because their jobs and day-to-day lives depend on being in the know? A long-time public interest PR professional, the managing editor of a major daily, a well-known columnist and reporter, a South Side community leader, a social media savvy publicist and the founder of a well-known startup took time out of their busy days to tell us what they read to stay informed.

Take note—these folks are super plugged in, literally, and are getting their news in every possible way all day long be it online, on their phone, in the car, at the gym, eating breakfast, from friends, on Facebook or, gasp! from the printed newspaper.



LAURA WASHINGTON

Columnist, *Chicago Sun-Times*
Political Analyst, ABC 7-Chicago

BY VALERIE DENNEY

As a political commentator, Laura Washington wants as much news as soon as it becomes available from as many different sources as possible. “In today’s news environment, you can’t depend on only one source,” Washington says. “Print, radio, TV, web, email—you have got to read it all.”

Washington starts her morning with her iPhone checking her email for news alerts and Twitter to see what’s come in overnight. At breakfast she moves onto the physical paper, scanning the *Chicago Sun-Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, and *New York Times* for interesting stories that aren’t necessarily breaking news and to see what the columnists are saying. “I like the physical feel of the paper and seeing the placement of stories—what’s on the front page; what’s next to what—tells me how my colleagues are thinking about the stories.”

After breakfast, Washington turns to her laptop to check the political blogosphere and then fans out to other websites from there. Key sources include: Politico, The Note, The Hill, Real Clear Politics, Romenesko, Capital Fax, The Sixth Ward, Chicagoist, Progress Illinois, and The Daily Whale. “Websites have become so attractive and accessible. It’s an efficient way to gather news: they have video, sound, good content, jazzy, sexy headlines. It’s like a smorgasbord. I never get enough of it.”

News directly from sources is also important to Washington. She reads press releases and other information from politicians to get their version of the story, and she believes that government agencies have become much more savvy—and effective—in their media relations.

Throughout the day, Washington continues to monitor her emails and check Twitter and Facebook. Twitter is an especially important source. “I get stuff on Twitter I don’t get anywhere else and I get stories sooner. Before the breaking news alert is out, the reporter has already tweeted the story.” Washington also tweets regularly under the name of @mediadervish. One challenge Washington faces: making sure that she is exposed to viewpoints different from her own. “Let’s face it, people follow you because they agree with you. I need to make sure I challenge myself to see the other side.” To that end, Washington regularly looks at conservative sites such as the Drudge Report, Illinois Policy Institute and Chicago Observer.

Washington also follows a number of weekly and monthly publications including *Newstips* (published by the Community Media Workshop), *Chicago Defender*, *Windy City Times*, *Chicago Reader*, *Time Out Chicago*, *Chicago* magazine blogs, *Crain’s Chicago Business* and *The New Yorker*. WBEZ and WVON are frequent radio listens. Her day ends with TV news, where she favors ABC Channel 7 and NBC Channel 5. “There is no media more compelling when it comes to telling a story that can make you cry than TV. You just can’t get that on a small screen.”

Washington feels well informed about Chicago but says there is still a big gap when it comes to covering communities of color. “There’s very little out there covering stories in the black community and much reporting of these communities is ill-informed or misinformed. The establishment media try, but they have a different mission.”

Guilty pleasures: “I shop; I don’t buy much, but I love to window shop.”

▶ Visit chicagoneews.org to watch Laura’s “What I Read” interview highlights.



2012 NEW NEWS RANKINGS

CITYWIDE NEWS

1. CHICAGOTRIBUNE.COM

Total score	32.92
Reach	25
News quality	4.46
Engagement	3.46

Chicago's premier daily newspaper site features good metro coverage with breaking news items and an improved site design that could still be tweaked, such as with a more discerning use of photos (especially less reliance on stock photography for breaking news) and better editing of video offered from site partners. Reviewers noted that a high volume of "breaking news" is police blotter information, but the coverage of the Sikh shooting was considered very high quality by the reviewers. Breaking news is handled in a variety of ways, with some stories being updated in place, while others are rewritten by new reporters. Comments from readers/visitors vary in quality, and Tribune staff—with the exception of a few columnists who have a major reader following—do not tend to engage with commenters on the site, although @ColonelTribune does engage with readers periodically and was a pioneer in using Twitter to engage with readers. Visitors must have Facebook accounts to comment, which associate comments with reader names in an effort to promote better civility on the site.

2. CHICAGOREADER.COM

Total score	32.7
Reach	24
News quality	4.3
Engagement	4.4

The site for this weekly alternative newspaper drew praise for its great journalism and entertaining writing, although reviewers lamented the organization's diminished capacity for news compared to prior years. Like many other sites in this category, the Reader site is basically integrated into social media but does not regularly use these tools to interact with readers or to share their perspectives.

3. (TIE) CHICAGOMAG.COM

Total score	32.6
Reach	24
News quality	4.3
Engagement	4.3

The website for this monthly magazine drew praise from reviewers for its strong and engaging writing but noted that social media engagement could be more robust. Chock full of lifestyle and personality profiles, this site's bloggers such as Whet Moser provide up-to-date content for the monthly magazine's online presence.

3. (TIE) WBEZ.ORG

Total score	32.6
Reach	24
News quality	4.5
Engagement	4.1

Reviewers praised the public radio station's site for offering in-depth, multimedia coverage that features multiple sources and diverse points of view. The site works to engage listeners and site visitors, using and inviting listener supplied photos and audio and facilitating conversation between reporters and social media followers.

5. CHICAGOBUSINESS.COM

Total score	31.66
Reach	24
News quality	4.26
Engagement	3.4

This site's "must-read" bloggers drive regular visits to the site, which contains timely and well-written reporting (if occasionally snarky). Reviewers noted the mix of news and features as well as the quality of the writing and infographics. Comments don't appear to be moderated on the site and frequently

represent extreme viewpoints. Reviewers praised use of Storify, a tool for aggregating interesting tweets, to amplify reader interest and point of view in particular stories.

6. NBCCHICAGO.COM/NEWS

Total score	31.3
Reach	24
News quality	3.9
Engagement	3.4

The site for this TV station covers local news, with an emphasis on crime, though during the review period the exclusive focus was on the Summer Olympics. The site updates stories frequently but often only features one voice until further developments are presented or investigated. Reviewers praised the site's investigative stories. The site does not use social media to engage in conversation about local coverage but instead to promote its stories.

7. WGNTV.COM

Total score	30.7
Reach	23
News quality	4.1
Engagement	3.6

Reviewers found a broad range of content available beyond TV reports on this site. Breaking news is frequently updated throughout the day. The story selection emphasizes local weather and covers more regional, national and international headline stories than other newscast-based sites. The site invites visitors to submit photos and weather updates but does not seem to draw a lot of comments on news stories. Readers tend to discuss stories with one another on social media, especially Facebook, but WGN staff engages only in a limited way with readers/viewers, usually on Twitter.

8. ABC7CHICAGO.COM

Total score	29.9
Reach	22
News quality	4.1
Engagement	3.8

The online site for this local TV station features hard news coverage, investigative reports and feature stories that are engaging and timely. Reviewers noted frequent updates to breaking news stories and good use of video as well as state-by-state regional news breakouts. While abc7chicago.com utilizes social media, it tends to do so to promote its own staff, rather than sharing additional voices as well, and does not always respond to comments or receive a high number of them.

9. (TIE) CHICAGO.CBSLOCAL.COM

Total score	29.7
Reach	22
News quality	3.9
Engagement	3.8

The online site for this local TV station features hard news coverage, investigative reports and feature stories. While breaking news coverage is often short, it is frequently updated. While the site uses social media to pose questions to followers, the site does not appear to follow up on viewer/visitor comments to drive discussion. Also, the site's Twitter account does not retweet content from Twitter followers, instead engaging more broadly with its own reporters and other media.

9. (TIE) SUNTIMES.COM

Total score	29.7
Reach	22
News quality	4.2
Engagement	3.5

The site for this daily newspaper features lively local coverage with frequent updates to breaking news,

if thinner news coverage than in years past, and thought-provoking columnists. Reviewers noted the website was “stodgy.” Columnists attract a lot of reader comments, though the paper does not use Twitter to engage with reporters, with few retweets of reader comments and no mentions or interactions with readers. Social media engagement is with staff writers instead.

11. CLTV.COM

Total score	27.9
Reach	22
News quality	3.2
Engagement	2.7

This site mostly mirrors WGN-TV and features limited local news beyond traffic, weather and crime. There is little evidence of visitor/viewer engagement or the events they hold. Breaking news is updated regularly. In conjunction with WGN-TV, CLTV uses Twitter to engage with readers and retweets items but has a “quieter” presence on Facebook.

12. VIVELOHOOY.COM

Total score	27.8
Reach	21
News quality	3.7
Engagement	3.1

The online site of this Spanish-language daily newspaper tends to feature coverage that is either national or crime-related. Reviewers were mixed on whether the site gave enough weight to coverage of the issues facing Chicago’s Latino/Hispanic community. Crime coverage appears to be sensational and does not necessarily provide context on the rate or nature of criminal activities. The site uses Facebook to promote content but not to engage in conversation. The site encourages bloggers to contribute content to the website.

13. WINDYCITYMEDIAGROUP.COM

Total ranking	27.6
Reach	20
News quality	3.8
Engagement	3.8

Reviewers praised this site as information-rich, covering local Chicago news, politics and crime as well as LGBT issues, but also noted that the site’s ad content is overwhelming. The site fosters reader engagement through comments, letters and Twitter. The Twitter feed for the site engages with its readers and facilitates discussion among followers, while the Facebook page is generally quiet.

14. MYFOXCHICAGO.COM

Total score	27.4
Reach	21
News quality	3.4
Engagement	3

The site for this TV station covers breaking news, local news and politics with a heavy focus on crime and sports. Stories are concise but showed a drive for ratings in a few areas. While the site operators make use of Facebook and Twitter, they primarily use these tools to 1) promote their own stories, rather than to respond to conversation, and 2) amplify staff and station stories rather than their visitor/viewer voices.

15. (TIE) BEACHWOODREPORTER.COM

Total score	27.1
Reach	21
News quality	3.4
Engagement	2.7

Offering engaging opinions about daily news, Beachwood Reporter does a better job of providing context for news, especially politics, than producing original reporting. The site also features sports, arts and entertainment. The site uses social media to share its own stories and retweet breaking news from other news sources. Reader voices on the site appear to be limited.

15. (TIE) WTTW.COM

Total score	27.1
Reach	20
News quality	3.9
Engagement	3.2

The site for this public television station features high quality reporting on a variety of topics, showcasing both written and video coverage. While the site focuses on all of WTTW-TV’s programming,

Chicago news is heavily featured. Stories are mostly from Chicago Tonight, but the site features reporting from other news sources as well. WTTW primarily uses Twitter to respond to reader questions and comments as well as to retweet content related to their stories that they did not necessarily produce.

17. WGNRADIO.COM

Total score	27
Reach	20
News quality	3.3
Engagement	3.7

The site for this radio station offers headline news briefs, borrowing heavily from the Chicago Tribune or other local or national sources. Site engages with listeners/visitors via contests and events but showcases few comments for news. @WGNRadio does interact with followers, facilitates discussion and retweets visitor/follower perspectives.

HONORABLE MENTIONS

Additional sites that play an important role in Chicago's online news ecosystem.

- bettergov.org
- occupiedchicagotribune.org
- news.medill.northwestern.edu/Chicago
- telemundochicago.com
- www.twcmag.com
- laraza.com
- wlsam.com
- chicagotalks.org
- chocolatecity.cc
- chicagodefender.com
- cantv.com
- feastoffun.com
- outsidetheloopradio.com
- wrte.org

WHAT I READ



SAM YAGAN Co-Founder, OkCupid

BY VALERIE DENNEY

Sam Yagan begins his media day with Morning Joe on MSNBC and by reading online on his phone or laptop the *New York Times*, Politico and other national and global news sources that help ground him in the news of the day. Online sources for technology news, such as TechCrunch and AllThingsD, are also part of his morning routine.

Though Chicago news is not necessarily his first priority Yagan follows two Chicago news sources online on a daily basis—*Crain's Chicago Business* and builtinchicago.org—in order to stay up-to-date on news about technology and start-up companies. “I proactively look at Crain's every day by following it on Twitter and reading it online on my phone,” Yagan says. “I use builtinchicago.org as a resource when I am looking for a specific piece of information or when I get an email about an interesting article.”

Yagan doesn't read the *Chicago Tribune* or the *Chicago Sun-Times* either in print or online. He listens to WBEZ-FM when he is in the car but doesn't watch Chicago news on television.

During the day Yagan gets news from his Twitter and Facebook accounts—primarily here and there when he gets a few free moments—and from email from colleagues, friends and family. “I'm in meetings all day and don't have time to check the news, so someone has to have filtered it for me somehow.”

Yagan estimates he gets 80 percent of his Chicago news online, and while he feels well informed in the areas that he cares about, he suspects he is missing stories of potential interest in other fields.

“I'm sure there are a whole set of things that I would be interested in if I saw them, but the way we consume news now means that I'm not exposed to them.”

Yagan does have a guilty pleasure, however: sports radio. “If I'm in the car, it's pretty much that or news radio.”



2012 NEW NEWS RANKINGS

SPECIALTY NEWS

1. CATALYST-CHICAGO.ORG

Total score	28.9
Reach	21
News quality	4.4
Engagement	3.5

The website for this publication that covers education in Chicago combines in-depth magazine-style coverage with daily updates through its Catalyst Notebook. While it provides a venue for extensive comments and social media integration, it does not respond to comments from readers.

2. PROGRESSILLINOIS.COM

Total score	28.8
Reach	21
News quality	4.4
Engagement	3.4

Covering politics from a progressive point of view, ProgressIllinois.com provides both original coverage and aggregated content. The site's Twitter feed features high quality engagement, but comments on the website are lacking.

3. CHICAGOREPORTER.COM

Total score	28.3
Reach	19
News quality	4.8
Engagement	4.5

This website focuses on the magazine's primary purpose: investigative reporting, with a focus on race and poverty. The site features the magazine's articles and two blogs: Chicago Muckrakers and The Teen Reporter. Written content is supplemented by photos and the occasional video. Comments are few and far between, though the site asks for tips on every page.

4. GRIDCHICAGO.COM

Total score	27.9
Reach	20
News quality	3.8
Engagement	4.1

This blog provides coverage on sustainable transit issues, predominantly cycling with reader engagement via comments and on Twitter.

5. ACTIVETRANS.ORG

Total score	27.2
Reach	20
News quality	3.7
Engagement	3.5

The Active Transportation Alliance's blog features news on the organization's work as well as transportation issues generally, especially biking. While it's possible to share content, social engagement seems minimal, and the site does not necessarily invite readers to suggest blog posts, blog ideas or ask questions.

6. CAPITOLFAX.COM

Total score	26.9
Reach	19
News quality	4.7
Engagement	3.2

This is the "authoritative" news blog on Illinois politics by journalist Rich Miller. Reviewers praised the writing for its conversational quality and for inviting comments. Miller engages with readers on the website and on Twitter, and he also uses his personal Facebook page to promote CapitolFax and interact with readers.

7. YOCHICAGO.COM

Total score	26.86
Reach	20
News quality	3.46
Engagement	3.4

This site covers real estate with a mix of well-sourced stories and a few “infomercials” for buying real estate. There is no contact information for the writers of the site and some commenting from readers.

8. CHICAGOPARENT.COM

Total score	26.46
Reach	18
News quality	4.66
Engagement	3.8

Chicago Parent’s website is a “must go-to” site for parents, covering babysitting to summer camps to children with special needs, and providing timely information, blogs and the magazine’s extensive archives. The site operates a reader community with space for personal essays and offers Facebook and Twitter accounts but does not engage with readers on Facebook or Twitter.

9. DISTRICT299.COM

Total score	24.53
Reach	17
News quality	4
Engagement	3.53

This site brings together timely news and perspectives on Chicago Public Schools and education issues. Reviewers considered it a “must read” for education reformers and CPS watchers. Comments are lively. The ChicagoNow template makes it hard to connect to Facebook and Twitter.

10. CHICGORADIOANDMEDIA.COM

Total score	24.5
Reach	19
News quality	2.9
Engagement	2.6

This site covers mainstream broadcast media industry news. Some content is independently reported while other items appear to be press releases. While photos appear with most stories, they are not always selected to enhance the story. The site features message boards but does not use Facebook and Twitter for reader engagement, but rather to promote its stories.

11. SECONDCITYCOP.BLOGSPOT.COM

Total score	22.86
Reach	18
News quality	2.8
Engagement	2.06

This blog, written by an anonymous Chicago police officer, aims to represent the point of view of rank and file Chicago police officers. Comment volume is quite high: all comments are anonymous, providing “unvarnished opinions, often not nice” and not always featuring opposing viewpoints.

HONORABLE MENTIONS

Additional sites that play an important role in Chicago’s online news ecosystem.

- streetwise.org
- schooltechconnect.com
- theexpiredmeter.com
- chicagonow.com/blogs/cta-tattler



2012 NEW NEWS RANKINGS

NEIGHBORHOOD NEWS

1. UPTOWNUPDATE.COM

Total score	27.73
Reach	21
News quality	3.6
Engagement	3.13

Once a vehicle to cover former Ald. Helen Shiller, this blog now covers news (mostly politics, business and crime) as well as features and local community events. It also contains a neighborhood feed from EveryBlock. It's not clear from the site who is publishing the content, but the site features engaged readers who comment on stories. The site publisher engages with readers via Facebook, sharing reader photos and entering discussions with readers.

2. CHICAGOJOURNAL.COM

Total score	25.93
Reach	19
News quality	4.33
Engagement	2.6

This is the website for a weekly newspaper covering the South Loop, West Loop and the Near West Side. In addition to newspaper coverage, the site features a blog for each of the three neighborhoods it covers. Stories generate some comments, but there is not a lot of engagement among readers, or between readers and the Journal, on social media or on the site.

3. CENTERSQUAREJOURNAL.COM

Total score	24.8
Reach	17
News quality	4.3
Engagement	3.5

This online-only site covers Lincoln Square, Center Square and Ravenswood Manor. One reviewer said, "If I lived in the communities that they focus on I would be on this site every day," praising both the

site's content and the Twitter feed. The site features multiple perspectives on news items and has a clean design. Readers have conversations with each other via social media and serve as a source of news, but the reviewers did not see site publishers engaging with readers.

4. CHICAGOWEEKLY.NET

Total score	24
Reach	17
News quality	4.2
Engagement	2.8

A site for a weekly newspaper run by University of Chicago students that covers South Side culture and news, Chicago Weekly's publication schedule tends to follow the academic year.

5. EDGEVILLEBUZZ.COM

Total score	23.73
Reach	17
News quality	3.33
Engagement	3.4

This site offers community news for Andersonville and Edgewater. One reviewer says it hits "all the marks for hyperlocal news" with links to local services such as nearest school, police station or neighborhood group. The site content is heavy on events and community notices and does not always carry follow-up to community activities. Feature stories do include multiple perspectives. The "about" pages list staff by email so readers can contact them. Reader engagement is strongest on Facebook, where the publication runs contests and responds to readers.

6. (TIE) PILSENPORTAL.ORG

Total score	23.5
Reach	17
News quality	3.3
Engagement	3.2

Pilsen Portal is an informational clearinghouse that is part of the Smart Communities Program, with 17 organizational partners. The site publishes stories in English or Spanish, and community members are encouraged to contribute. The site is heavy on calendar listings and aggregation but also provides community resources. Reviewers complimented the site's use of video and photography. Reader engagement appears to be limited on social media.

6. (TIE) SLOOPIN.COM

Total score	23.5
Reach	18
News quality	3
Engagement	2.5

Sloopin covers the South Loop, especially business stories and other media coverage of the South Loop. The site is mostly feature news with less of an emphasis on hard news. It's not clear from the site who provides the coverage, but community contributions are welcome. The site uses social media to promote coverage but not to engage readers.

8. COLUMBIACHRONICLE.COM

Total score	22.92
Reach	16
News quality	3.46
Engagement	3.46

The student newspaper of Columbia College covers both campus and the South Loop "surprisingly well," with some metropolitan news mixed in as well. The site makes good use of photography and videos, and the stories feature multiple perspectives. The site best engages its readers on Facebook, with less engagement on Twitter.

9. CHICAGO-PIPELINE.COM

Total score	22.63
Reach	17
News quality	2.3
Engagement	3.33

This site covers Wicker Park and Bucktown and publishes an e-newsletter as well. Coverage comes from reporters, reader-contributors and local businesses/sponsors. Stories vary in featuring different perspectives. The site prominently features its latest comments on its front page. It also goes out of its way to thank its donors, especially one donor who helped them buy a new computer for the site. Site offers a participation hotline but doesn't define what it means by participation.

10. BEVERLYREVIEW.NET

Total score	22.5
Reach	16
News quality	3.7
Engagement	2.8

This website is the online home of a weekly newspaper covering Beverly Hills, Morgan Park and Mount Greenwood. Content is pulled mostly from the weekly newspaper, and the journalism features multiple perspectives. The site does not accept comments but does post letters to the editor. It also seems to have limited use for Twitter but has had better success in drawing reader comments from Facebook.

11. WELLES PARK BULLDOG.COM

Total score	20.9
Reach	16
News quality	2.9
Engagement	2

Although the exact boundaries of the site's coverage are not entirely clear from the site, its

main focus is Lincoln Square. The site's offerings have won journalistic awards but reviewers wished for a more consistent volume of coverage. The site makes good use of Twitter and Facebook to ask audience questions but doesn't always get responses. Reviewers praised the site's editorial mission statement and ethics policy.

HONORABLE MENTIONS

Additional sites that play an important role in Chicago's online news ecosystem.

- austintalks.org
- bronzecomm.com
- redlineproject.org
- facebook.com/LaVillitaChicago
- rogersparknews.com

WHAT I READ



FERNANDO DIAZ

Managing Editor, *Hoy*

BY VALERIE DENNEY

Fernando Diaz has a prodigious news appetite, and it is focused on identifying stories around which he can anchor Chicago-based stories that appeal to Hoy's local, national and international audiences. "Hispanics have access to satellite television and Spanish news from all over; what they don't have is enough news from Chicago," Diaz says. "Our goal is to be the Chicago gateway to news of all kinds for Hispanic readers—especially young, bilingual Hispanics comfortable in an English-dominant world."

Diaz's quest begins at 6:00 a.m. when he wakes up and picks up his iPhone. Before breakfast he has reviewed email posts from a dozen or so different newspapers, recent Twitter posts and a set of news aggregators, such as FlipBoard, Google Currents, or AOL Editions that have been especially formatted for easy reading on iPhones and iPads.

After his iPhone, Diaz picks up his laptop and uses it to access a wide variety of news outlets ranging from the *Chicago Tribune* to the *New York Times*, Reuters, and Huffington Post, as well as leading Spanish-language news outlets around the world.

Estimating that he obtains only 30 to 40 percent of his Chicago-specific news online, Diaz says that a wide variety of print publications are a necessity in order to stay abreast of the competition and spot potential news stories of interest to larger audiences. Regular print reads include *Lawndale News*, *Extra*, *La Raza* and *El Dia*, *RedEye*, *Chicago Journal* and the *Chicago Reader*. Online, Gapers Block, Beachwood Reporter and the Chicago Reporter are also important go-to sources. At night he watches local television, which he has recorded during the day. He only listens to radio in the car and then only WBBM-AM.

Email also plays a critical role in Diaz's news diet. Locally, he follows Progress Illinois, Beachwood Reporter and Gapers Block. Other favorite newsletters include: CQ Behind the Lines, Gorkana, mediabistro, muckraker.com and Personal Democracy Forum.

All this doesn't leave much time for social media during work hours. "I super-size in the morning and then update at lunch and during the evening."

Does Diaz feel well informed about Chicago issues? "No, there is just so damn much going on. Everyday I drink from the fire hose, and every day the hose gets bigger and bigger."

Guilty pleasures? When he has time Diaz pursues his interest in how print design works and looks, by taking screen grabs and mocking up stories for apps that he hopes to build sometime in the future. "Content is not enough; you need a platform where people want to get that content."

▶ Visit chicagoneews.org to watch Fernando's "What I Read" interview highlights.

ETHNIC MEDIA ONLINE

BY EMILY CULBERTSON

Just as mainstream publishers and broadcasters have struggled to make the transition to a new online world, ethnic media has struggled as well. Many ethnic media outlets came into the most recent recession with smaller budgets and leaner operations than their mainstream counterparts, and the recession has slashed the newsrooms of traditional and ethnic media alike. Some outlets' lack of comfort with technology, in addition to budget woes, has made the transition even more challenging.

To promote the vital stories produced by Chicago's ethnic media, and to help ethnic media become stronger in the shifting media landscape, The McCormick Foundation funded the Ethnic Media Project, based at Community Media Workshop.

Despite the many challenges facing ethnic media, Ethnic Media Project Director Steve Franklin, a long-time Chicago Tribune reporter, has noticed many promising trends in Chicago's ethnic media community as well, including a number of newer Hispanic/Latino online media outlets and the strength of Asian-American media, especially Indian-American media, in making the move to online. While budgets may be slim and paid reporters few, ethnic media is still committed to telling the stories about the diverse communities throughout the city. The voices represented in Chicago's ethnic media publications are often overlooked in mainstream news, especially as that news hole shrinks, making a thriving ethnic media scene more critical than ever. Ethnic media will continue to struggle and be challenged to "do more with less," but the Workshop sees drive and determination among many publishers to keep telling the stories about the communities and people who make Chicago the great, diverse city that it is. Finding ways, financially and strategically, to support ethnic media moving forward will be critical to its long-term success.

Here is a selection of notable ethnic media outlets among the 120 city, regional and national outlets originally on our screening list. These are a combination of sites that we liked plus sites that were deemed citywide and scored at least 10+ and weren't solely a link to an e-reader.

AFRICAN AMERICAN

- **chicagodefender.com**
(honorable mention in Citywide News)
- **chicagocrusader.com**
- **chocolatecity.cc** *(honorable mention in Citywide News)*

ASIAN AMERICAN

- **chicagochinesenews.com**
- **desitalkchicago.com**
- **indiatribune.com**
- **canews.com**
- **urdutimesusa.com/chicago**

HISPANIC/LATINO

- **facebook.com/LaVillitaChicago**
(honorable mention in Neighborhood News)
- **vivelohoy.com** *(ranked in Citywide News)*
- **hispanicallyspeakingnews.com** *(ranked in Aggregators)*
- **gozamos.com** *(honorable mention in Arts, Culture and Entertainment)*
- **chicagonoticias.com**
- **latina-voices.com**
- **laraza.com** *(honorable mention in Citywide News)*
- **telemundochicago.com**
(honorable mention in Citywide News)
- **arteyvidachicago.com**
(honorable mention in Arts, Culture and Entertainment)

- **contratiempo.net**
- **lanuevasemana.com**
- **wrte.org** *(honorable mention in Citywide News)*

EUROPEAN

- **polishnews.com**
- **aidas.us**
- **myreklama.com**
- **polskieradio.com**
- **dziennikzwiazkowy.com**
- **keralaexpress.com**
- **thegreekstar.com**
- **wietrzneradio.com**
- **bulgaria-weekly.com**



2012 NEW NEWS RANKINGS

ARTS, CULTURE AND ENTERTAINMENT

1. TIMEOUTCHICAGO.COM

Total score	30.6
Reach	24
News quality	3.2
Engagement	3.4

The website of this weekly magazine is packed with content (“so much content ... it gives me anxiety,” said one reviewer). The site is a go-to source for arts and entertainment listings as well as for Robert Feder’s media coverage, but one reviewer voiced a preference for the printed magazine. Stories or features did not appear to consistently offer comments. The Twitter feed is helpful “in small doses” according to one reviewer.

2. REDEYECCHICAGO.COM

Total score	28.8
Reach	23
News quality	2.4
Engagement	3.4

The website for the daily commuter paper distributed by the Tribune is heavy on photos. It uses Facebook and Twitter to engage with readers and encourage comments, and it shares content from other news sources, such as Gapers Block and WBEZ.

3. CHICAGO.EATER.COM

Total score	28
Reach	21
News quality	3.5
Engagement	3.5

The Chicago outpost of the Eater family of websites brings together news of the dining and drinking scene in Chicago, focused on the South and North sides as well as the Loop. They provide both original reporting and aggregation. The site features reader comments and has a dating site tie-in. Reviewers considered the content organized

by neighborhood to be useful. The site’s Facebook page features a great deal of reader engagement.

4. NEWCITY.COM

Total score	27.1
Reach	21
News quality	3.4
Engagement	2.7

Newcity.com is the flagship of a family of sites covering the arts in Chicago. Reviewers praised their coverage of music, arts, theater and literature, given that relatively few online sites cover arts, but sought more expansive articles. Reviewers also noted that the site covers the entire city but tends to provide greater focus on the North Side. Reader engagement on the site or via social media appears to be low.

5. CHICAGO.GRUBSTREET.COM

Total score	26.3
Reach	21
News quality	3.1
Engagement	2.2

The Chicago branch of Grubstreet makes great use of video and slideshows and also makes good use of aggregation to other food coverage. The site has a useful restaurant finder. Grubstreet encourages readers to upload photos of food and restaurants to a Flickr pool. Social media engagement seemed limited, and it was hard for reviewers to find contact information for Chicago editors.

HONORABLE MENTIONS

Additional sites that play an important role in Chicago’s online news ecosystem.

- gozamos.com
- chicago.metromix.org
- lthforum.com
- chicagotheaterbeat.com
- arteyvidachicago.com
- chicagoclassicalreview.com

WHAT I READ



VALERIE DENNEY

President, Valerie Denney Communications

BY EMILY CULBERTSON

As a public relations strategist for nonprofit organizations and issues, Valerie seeks news to understand the conversations taking place at the local, state and national level in order to position her clients in the context of those conversations. “I generally want to understand what people are talking about and the language they use to talk about it,” Valerie said.

She begins her day with coffee, breakfast and her iPad, occasionally listening to WBEZ as well. She reads three newspapers via their iPad apps: *Chicago Tribune*, *the Chicago Sun-Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*. At the *Tribune*, she focuses on national, politics, business and opinion, especially seeking out particular columnists, including Steve Chapman, John Kass, Mary Schmich and Eric Zorn. With the *Sun-Times*, she looks at all headlines, and with the *Wall Street Journal*, she focuses on the front page and Personal Journal.

Valerie notes that the design of news apps seems unorganized, almost an afterthought. “It’s the huge downside to reading online,” she said. “I’m dedicated to ferreting out the information I want. If you’re not, you can miss so much.”

Valerie relies upon e-mail news alerts from CNN, the *Wall Street Journal* and *Crain’s Chicago Business*, and glances at email from local nonprofit organizations. She also frequently gets e-mail from colleagues sharing stories.

During the day, she makes sure to check on The Daily Beast, especially Andrew Sullivan’s The Dish, which curates news from different political perspectives. “You can hear how people on all sides are talking,” Valerie said. She also reads Greg Hinz’s politics blog at Crain’s and Rich Miller at Capitol Fax. As time permits, she’ll check in on Politico and Reddit’s politics channel, and occasionally she’ll read the Huffington Post or watch PBS Newshour segments on her iPad.

She finds value in bloggers who bring together different voices and content. “I’m finding that’s a much more satisfying way to understand things than following one big media outlet,” she said. “I look for good reporting, wherever it happens to be.”

Valerie often listens to WBEZ in the morning, in the afternoon and in the evening after dinner. She is experimenting with stitcher.com, an app that allows people to listen to public radio shows and podcasts on-demand. She does not watch local television news.

Valerie reads her print subscription to Crain’s and glances at e-mail promoting the latest news from *Catalyst* and *Chicago Reporter*. She subscribes to *The New Yorker* but reads it on her iPad.

Valerie estimates she gets 95% of her local news online.

While she feels she is well informed about Chicago, she knows from her work with nonprofit organizations that huge areas of news, such as poverty and housing, are uncovered or covered poorly in the media. She also notes that the media does a poor job of helping people understand how political relationships affect policy outcomes.

Valerie’s guilty pleasures include video game news sites, *Huffington Post*’s entertainment section, LOLcats and TED videos.



2012 NEW NEWS RANKINGS

AGGREGATORS

1. CHICAGOIST.COM

Total ranking	31.6
Reach	24
News quality	3.8
Engagement	3.8

This site, part of a national network of aggregators, provides well-written summaries of a variety of news (from the “serious to the silly”). The site welcomes tips, and editors engage with readers.

2. CHICAGO.EVERYBLOCK.COM

Total ranking	27.5
Reach	21
News quality	3.3
Engagement	3.2

The flagship site of the national hyperlocal news aggregator allows visitors to create their own aggregated view of content from their neighborhood by zip code, ward name or neighborhood name. The community message boards appear to help neighbors sort out particular issues. Reviewers praised the site’s responsiveness on Twitter, where they retweet their followers’ content and respond to readers. The site also promotes offline community events by encouraging neighbors to get together for dinner.

3. HISPANICALLYSPEAKINGNEWS.COM

Total score	27.3
Reach	22
News quality	2.9
Engagement	2.4

This site combines aggregation and original reporting, promoting a hyperlocal news site for Latinos organized by neighborhood. Coverage seemed sparse and dated to our reviewers, although reviewers praised Estelle Walgreen’s opinion pieces. Engagement with readers seems

limited, though they share content from other sites via their Twitter feed.

4. GAPERSBLOCK.COM

Total score	27.2
Reach	19
News quality	4.1
Engagement	4.1

This site combines aggregation of local news with original content on a variety of subjects from citizen journalists and bloggers. The site seeks feedback on stories and responds to comments from its engaged audience.

5. CHICAGONEWSREPORT.COM

Total score	23.1
Reach	18
News quality	2.7
Engagement	2.4

This site aggregates basic police blotter news by neighborhood, focusing on the North Side, with anonymous, often snarky, commentary. The site features pictures and some video from other sites. The comments are provocative, drawn by a blogger who is prone to obscenities and name-calling.

6. HUFFINGTONPOST.COM/CHICAGO

Total score	21.7
Reach	14
News quality	4.2
Engagement	3.5

The Chicago edition of this online newspaper aggregates local news and features a crew of local bloggers. It’s hard, when following certain items, to get back to the Chicago site once you leave it. The site features an active commenting community. Editors’ contact information was hard for reviewers to find.

7. NEWCOMMUNITIES.ORG/NEWS/CNNB.ASP

Total score	21.1
Reach	13
News quality	4.5
Engagement	3.6

This site aggregates content from other New Communities Program sites, produced by LISC Chicago freelancers or community organizations. Reviewers praised the site's high quality writing and reporting. While it's easy to share content, there are few comments.

WHAT I READ



ERNEST SANDERS

Northeast Regional e-Team, Partnership for a Connected Illinois Owner, Sobering Book Publications

BY VALERIE DENNEY

A lifelong Chicago community advocate and activist, Ernest Sanders follows a wide variety of news outlets in order identify new resources for change at the community level.

"I want to know the decisions being made at the highest level that impact community economic development, but I need to speak to the kid on the street as well as policy leaders, so I need a range of sources from the community to citywide and national news outlets," Sanders says.

Sanders starts his day at 5:00 a.m. with the TV news where he may rotate through local channels for up to two hours while he exercises, checks email online and eats breakfast. During working hours, he receives most news on his laptop either online or via email. *Crain's Chicago Business* and the *Chicago Tribune* provide breaking news alerts, but Sanders mainly depends on a wide variety of lesser-known newsmakers to keep him up to date on community level issues and activities. His sources include Carl West at TBT News Service, Phil Jackson at Black Star Journal, Raynard Hall's BRONZECOMM, Ujamaa Network, Catalyst, Healthy Schools Campaign, Consortium to Lower Childhood Obesity, Lumity, Auburn Gresham Community Portal, Publicity Club of Chicago, everyblock.com, Huffington Post, and many others.

Philanthropy News Digest is another important source. "I'm resource-driven."

Traditional news sources are less important to Sanders. He doesn't subscribe to print editions of either the *Tribune* or the *Chicago Sun-Times* and checks them out online only occasionally. He only listens to radio in the car and then only to WBEZ-FM and WVON-AM.

He is, however a regular contributor to Facebook, mainly checking in at the beginning and end of the day. And he is steadily increasing his engagement with Twitter. "Twitter started resonating for me when President Obama sent his first Tweet, and Rahm Emmanuel held a Twitter Town Hall. Now I tweet regularly, particularly if I am at a meeting that is important to my followers." Sanders also follows journalists, state and city leaders and other high profile organizations engaged in community work on his phone.

Sanders feels like he is well informed about Chicago issues but says established media often misses important street-level stories. He cites the pioneering community news portals set up by the Smart Communities Program in which residents report on what is happening within their own communities. "So many things are happening that are not reported in the evening news. These portals create a connection to the community voice in the church, the barber shop, the community center that may not be accessible in any other way."

Sanders guilty online pleasure? Dailymile.com connects Sanders with an online exercise community where users share information and support each other in reaching their physical fitness goals.

METHODOLOGY

Community Media Workshop constructed The NEW News report for 2012 in four stages:

1. Compiling a master list of sites to consider;
2. Narrowing down the list based on certain criteria;
3. Undertaking a broad quantitative review of outlets' news output, social media reach and web reach; and
4. Conducting a qualitative assessment of 51 sites' news and community engagement.

At the outset of the project, the Workshop compiled a list of more than 1,000 URLs to review from several sources:

- "Getting On Air, Online & Into Print," the media guide published annually by Community Media Workshop.
- The NEW News 2010 list, collected via a survey of news site operators.
- A list Rich Gordon of Northwestern University compiled as part of a separate project funded by The Chicago Community Trust to understand the network connections among Chicago news and information sites.
- A list maintained by Workshop staff of sites overlooked in the 2010 report.
- An open call posted on the Workshop's NP Communicator blog.

The Workshop combined all of the lists, removing both duplicates and sites that do not primarily serve the City of Chicago (as opposed to a primarily suburban audience), reducing the list to 476 websites. The Workshop then reviewed each of those sites to see if they published a minimum amount of news production, which we defined as publishing 12 or more items in April 2012. We borrowed our criteria here from Michele McLellan's prior research on hyperlocal news.

Our review uncovered 191 sites that met the criteria. For the 191 sites, we measured the following sources of data, assigning scores between 1 and 5 as the chart below indicates. In the end, each site had a quantitative score of between 5 and 25, based on the factors listed in Chart 1 below.

The Workshop also categorized sites into one of five categories:

- Citywide news: news outlets that cover the entire city.
- Neighborhood news: news outlets that cover one or more neighborhoods (such as Hyde Park or Austin) in the city.
- Specialty news: news outlets that cover one or more topics or themes (such as schools or crime) or that focus solely on investigative or watchdog journalism.
- Arts, entertainment and culture: sites that cover the arts, culture, entertainment or dining.

CHART 1

SOURCE	1 pt	2 pts	3 pts	4 pts	5 pts
Google RSS readers	0	1-30	31-75	76-250	251+
Compete.com estimates	Less than 500	500-999	1000-4999	5,000-25,000	25,000+
Facebook "likes" and/or Twitter followers (take higher #) (institutional and/or one promoted from front page of news source)	Less than 100	100-199	200-499	500-999	1000+
Google page rank	1	2	3	4-5	6+
Alexa traffic rank*	(Not used)	None	Site ranked in the millions	Ranked in the hundreds of thousands	Ranked in the tens of thousands or higher

*Note: The lower the rank, the larger the site's traffic. For comparison: Facebook is ranked #1.

- Aggregation: sites that primarily, though not exclusively, bring together the latest news from multiple sources.

Many sites could have been reviewed in more than one category; in the end, final category selection reflected the overall judgment of the Workshop.

DETERMINING WHICH SITES TO SCORE FOR NEWS QUALITY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Our goal was to rank approximately 50 sites. Initially, our plan was to score 10 sites in each category. This turned out to be a problematic way to proceed. By the nature of the project, sites in each category have different levels of audience reach (citywide news and arts and entertainment having the largest potential audiences; neighborhood and specialty news having smaller potential audiences) so the scoring cutoff for each category varied. Additionally, a very large number of sites had very similar scores in a few categories, especially citywide news, making it difficult to limit those categories to 10. Here is our breakdown of sites we scored in each category, and the scoring cutoffs we chose.

- Given the large number of citywide news sites scoring within a few points of each other, we ended up ranking 17 sites that scored at least 20 out of 25 points on our quantitative scoring. As a result, we had to trim the number of sites we ranked in other categories.
- It remained important to us to rank at least 10 sites in the categories of neighborhood news and specialty news. We ranked 11 sites scoring 16 or higher (out of 25) for neighborhood news; and 11 sites scoring a 17 or higher (out of 25) for specialty news.
- To accommodate the large number of citywide news sites, neighborhood news sites and specialty news sites, we ended up reviewing a relatively small number of arts and culture websites, reviewing five sites rating 21 or higher (out of 25) for arts, culture and entertainment.
- We had a small number of aggregators within the study. We ultimately reviewed seven aggregators that scored 13 or higher (out of 25).
- In all cases, Workshop members reviewed all sites in a category that had the same score.

We brought our proposed list of sites to score, as well as our categories, to our Advisory Committee, which provided feedback on our choices and our organization of data.

REVIEWING SITES FOR NEWS QUALITY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

After broad discussions within the research team and the Advisory Committee, we determined criteria to score sites for news quality and community engagement. The Workshop staff then ranked sites in two qualitative areas: news quality and community engagement. Each site could score between 1 and 5 in these two categories. As a result, the total score possible for each site increased from 25 to 35.

Workshop staff scored the following elements equally to come up with a 1 to 5 rating.

For news quality:

- Website covers a range of topics or geographic areas within its area of focus.
- Website's coverage is thorough.
- Website coverage attempts to reach and cover multiple points of view in storytelling, especially those whose viewpoints are not necessarily heard from.
- News writing is strong and engaging (not scored for aggregators).
- Aggregation practices are fair (with clear links to sources and not excessive reuse of content) (for aggregators only).
- The source of aggregated content is clear and understood (for aggregators only).
- Website is well designed and takes advantage of all the tools of online/multimedia to tell stories.

For community engagement:

- It's easy to find out who is publishing the website and to get a glimpse of the people reporting and editing the news.
- It is easy to share content and it is easy to find out if content is being shared.
- The voices of site visitors play a well-managed role on the site and/or on Facebook and Twitter.
- It is easy and prominent for users to email tips, photos and other information to the website for consideration for coverage.
- Site or its members holds offline events.

Workshop staffers conducted the reviews, with each site receiving at least two reviews. Workshop team members not involved with the rankings compared the reviews between reviewers and requested additional reviews for sites where rankings in one or more categories were widely divergent.

Once scoring was complete, the Workshop added the two averaged scores to the existing scores to complete a final ranking. Partial scores were discarded. We have awarded Honorable Mention to several additional sites in each category at the judgment and discretion of the Workshop.

The report's total scores can add up to a maximum of 35 points. Twenty-five of the 35 points reflect the size and reach of a site's audience; 5 points reflect the Workshop's assessment of its news quality; and 5 points reflect the Workshop's assessment of its community engagement.

By definition, sites that made the rankings by definition had the largest audiences and reach among their peer sites that the Workshop's methodology was capable of measuring. (Some sites are structured in a way that makes measuring their reach using our methodology difficult; we discuss this in the limitations.) Sites that are at the

WHAT I READ



AMBAR MENTOR-TRUPPA Vice President, Carolyn Grisko & Associates Inc.

BY VALERIE DENNEY

Ambar's primary interest is issue-oriented news, and she loves the immediacy digital platforms provide, especially when it comes to her client work in workforce development, health care and education.

Ambar Mentor-Truppa picks up her iPhone first thing in the morning and throughout the day, checking emails from news sources and others first, then her Twitter and Facebook accounts. "The iPhone is a mini-extension of my body," Ambar says.

She skims Chicago's main print news sources — *Chicago Tribune*, *Chicago Sun-Times*, *Crain's Chicago Business* — online every day and checks breaking news email alerts from these publications throughout the day. And she checks out the *New York Times* for stories that can help contextual local issues. Though Ambar is ready to go all digital, her husband still craves the experience of the physical paper so she often flips through that as well. "The key is everything is very fast paced; a leisurely read of the paper just isn't possible anymore," she says.

Ambar's Twitter and Facebook accounts are open and on all the time, and she skims through both every couple of hours. Tweetdeck helps her organize tweets so that news-oriented tweets are easily accessible. "I can't stay in touch with everything personally," Ambar says. "These tools can help me start a conversation or quickly find out what other people are talking about and finding relevant."

She also finds more and more news content showing up on her Facebook feed. For example she finds herself reading a lot of Huffington Post content without actually going to the site.

Organizational websites and online newsletters that offer links to traditional media stories and organizationally generated content about people and activities are another important one-stop source of news for Ambar. First class examples include: Women Employed (Ambar is on their board), Heartland Alliance and Advance Illinois.

WBEZ-FM is also a favorite, but TV news is a two to three times of week thing, at best.

Ambar saves her long form content for weekly, monthly or occasional reading, using a combination of online and print sources. Newsweek and Flipbook provide a national outlook. Most important Chicago news sources include *Chicago Reader*, *Chicagoist*, *Time Out Chicago* and *Chicago* magazine. In all, Ambar estimates that nearly three-quarters of her news about Chicago is obtained online.

Ambar feels well informed about Chicago, but only up to a point. "I feel the news provides a baseline, but I don't think the resources are being devoted to get at the deeper stories to help us understand crime or education. This is a missed opportunity." Ambar's guilty pleasure is jezebel.com. "It's got a snarky feminist point of view that makes me laugh and think at the same time."

top of the rankings often, but not always, have higher scores for news quality and community engagement than other sites. In some instances, sites with high scores in audience and reach develop a points lead that cannot be overcome by stellar news quality and community engagement scores. We have provided summaries of the scores for each category to satisfy reader interest as to the components that make up each site's score.

LIMITATIONS

The Workshop continues to both build on prior research studies (NEW News 2009 and 2010) and the peer research in the field. These methods of research are evolving though, and people may not agree on any single combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to evaluate the quality and relevance of online local news.

Here are some of the limitations that we are aware of as we worked on this project:

- Due to the nature of our project, we did not have time or resources to evaluate the online news landscape serving suburban Chicago. We have written about trends in online news in suburban Chicago in a separate sidebar.
- We did not evaluate ethnic and multicultural news in a separate category. It is likely ethnic media is underrepresented in the final rankings because we suspect our measures of reach undercount or understate the online reach of many ethnic news sites, especially those not published in English. We evaluated sites geared toward a particular ethnic or racial audience based on the area of the city they covered. Therefore, only two ethnic news outlets are in the final rankings. We have discussed the challenges facing ethnic media, and additional ethnic media standouts, in a separate sidebar.
- We did not include Workshop sites such as the long-standing news site Newstips or sites run by Advisory Committee members in order to keep the ranking process fair and unbiased.
- We rely upon public measures of site traffic, such as Compete.com, rather than analytics from site publishers, which means that in many instances, traffic to smaller sites is likely undercounted. This is a choice we made based on our prior experiences with self-reported analytics. The 2009 NEW News study's reliance on self-reported data turned out to be controversial because we could not audit data provided by site operators. In the 2010 report, we used Compete.com data to measure the reach of online news in Chicago but were stymied by the complete lack of data for most

Chicago publishers. Site publishers had recommended we use Quantcast instead, although Quantcast data is sometimes not available and varies in accuracy based on whether the site operator has installed Quantcast on their site. We found more sites in our study had some Compete.com data than in our 2010 review, although Compete.com is still skewed toward larger sites with a national reach.

- Our focus this year is on news outlets that operate websites. As a result, a few email newsletters that broadly serve a similar purpose could not be considered. In a few instances, those e-newsletters receive Honorable Mentions or are mentioned in "What I Read."
- Our reach measurements favor freestanding websites. This methodology undercounts the reach of sites that are built as part of a larger site structure (for example, Huffington Post Chicago).
- We borrowed heavily from the 2009 report's scoring bands for web reach and readership. It is possible that this scoring does not make fine enough distinctions between large sites with large readership and smaller sites with different levels of readership. Hopefully in both cases, this means that the Workshop's assessment of news quality and engagement can help ensure that the largest sites aren't the only sites with the possibility of a high ranking.

SUBURBAN MEDIA ONLINE

Past Year Brings Changes, Upheaval to Suburban Online News

BY CURTIS BLACK

Online news in Chicago's suburbs is dominated by big media companies—all of them still searching for the formula to make “hyperlocal” a profitable enterprise—along with websites associated with local newspapers, a few independent news sites and a variety of blogs.

The big story this year was the meteoric rise and fall of the Tribune's experiment with Chicago-based Journatic to provide content for TribLocal, a network of 90 hyperlocal news sites and 22 weekly papers.

In July the Tribune suspended its relationship with Journatic (while the Sun Times and GateHouse Publications terminated theirs) following revelations of plagiarized and fabricated quotes in one Journatic story and false bylines on hundreds of others.

An episode on This American Life also raised questions about local news being produced by low-wage, piece-rate writers and researchers based far from the action, including many in the Philippines. And some readers and media critics (and one local editor) complained about the quality of the content produced by Journatic for TribLocal.

GateHouse cited problems with the relevance, accuracy, timeliness, and even the grammar of Journatic's offerings. The company, whose holdings include over 50 weekly Suburban Life newspapers with websites in the Chicago suburbs, is opening its own “centralized content hub” in Rockford.

Journatic Editorial Chief Mike Fourcher, founder of a network of hyperlocal community sites in Chicago, resigned, saying his recommendations for rewarding editorial quality along with production efficiency metrics had been ignored. He told the Chicago Reader, “The company's model falters...when it attempts to treat community news reporting the same way as data reporting.”

The Tribune, which in April made an undisclosed “strategic investment” in Journatic (in May the new company filed notice that it had sold \$3.2 million in

stock), reported later in July that it had hired Randy Weissman, a former editor, to consult with Journatic in an effort to “preserve its relationship” with the company. “Profound” changes would be required in order to do so, said Tribune Editor and Vice President Gerould Kern.

Eighty-eight Tribune staffers wrote Kern requesting transparency about dealings with Journatic and warning of dangers to the organization's credibility. The Free Press, a media reform group, delivered petitions with 20,000 signers to the Tribune calling on the company to “stop outsourcing local news and put out-of-work local journalists back on local beats.” The group called Journatic a “jobs-killing operation.”

Journatic has its defenders. “It would be unfortunate if this incident clouds the otherwise fine work Journatic is doing to further local community news coverage,” Chicago Tribune Media Group Vice President Brad Moore said. “Journatic still deserves a chance to make up for this mistake and do better,” commented former Patch Editor-In-Chief Brad Farnham.

Media technology enthusiasts like Matthew Ingram argued that Journatic's ethical lapses resulted from forcing “new content” into an old content form, the traditional news story, and that economic realities may make it impossible for companies like Tribune to produce local content using local journalists.

On the other side, Poynter's Jeff Sonderman argued that community journalism depends on listening to and building relationships with readers; that local sites need to be tailored to local communities, and that community journalism “does not scale.”

In contrast to Journatic's focus on cutting the cost of journalism, another big local (and national) player, AOL's Patch, hired locally based journalists to edit hundreds of community sites. Both companies are struggling financially, with Tribune coming out of bankruptcy, AOL still striving for profitability as it refashions itself as a content-

provider. (GateHouse is also facing a financial squeeze after several large acquisitions.) At last count Patch had over 50 sites in Chicago area communities, featuring local news reports along with calendars, guides, and a new push to sign up neighborhood bloggers. Local editors say their autonomy has decreased with a shifting series of corporate directives, and their budgets for freelancers have been slashed. AOL's CEO Tim Armstrong — who came to the corporation after founding Patch — seems committed to investing in the operation. Some investors are pressuring AOL to drop Patch, concerned particularly that all those journalists just cost too much money.

Armstrong has promised to make Patch profitable by the end of 2013, and along with cutting freelancers, some local sites are now being merged, including some in Illinois. He's also promised a shift from local news into "community networking" and an approach that could resemble small-town versions of Craig's List. This is a work in progress with an uncertain future. The suburbs are dotted with news sites operated by local newspapers including the Daily Herald, the Southwest News-Herald, the Hinsdalean and the Evanston Roundtable, along with the Sun-Times-owned Southtown Star and Pioneer Papers, and other local chains including the Journal and Topics, 22nd Century Media, and Voyager Media. Many of these mix local news with regional coverage, and many are essentially adjuncts to their associated newspapers. New leadership at the Sun Times has indicated a continued commitment to the 23 weekly Pioneer Papers (seven others were shut down in 2010), with a new design for hyperlocal news being rolled out and plans for improved online and mobile products.

The Wednesday Journal may stand out as a community newspaper group which is increasingly focusing on its online presence, located at OakPark.com and RiverForest.com as well as in several Chicago communities.

If community journalism "does not scale" — if it's simply too labor-intensive to do it well and meet the profitability requirements of major corporations — is the future in independently owned and operated news sites? In the Chicago suburbs, such offerings are rare, though they show promise.

To the south, eNews Park Forest features some local reporting along with press releases and city and national news, providing a breadth of coverage not available elsewhere in the area. On the North Shore, Gazebo News includes notices submitted by

local groups, readers' forums, and business announcements. In Kane County, Hawk View offers short but solid original news reports (its slogan is "Just News") focused on Elburn and Campton Hills.

Evanston Now may be the meatiest independent local news site, with extensive staff-written news reports along with crime blotters and events listings. The site belongs to Authentically Local, a national network of 45 independently owned hyperlocal sites that emphasizes the importance of homegrown media and the danger of homogenization posed by corporate efforts to dominate local news.

One fascinating effort that could be a model for other communities is Skokie Net, sponsored by the Skokie Public Library. It grew out of GoSkokie, a 2004 project of new media students at Medill. It features news, opinion, features and information "for the people, by the people."

Residents blog there, art teachers post student work, poets post poems, a Holocaust survivor has posted a memoir. Students who volunteer for the summer are invited to become reporters or review a concert or book. Under development now are new immigrant pages, with a goal of offering something for speakers of each of the 90 languages used in Skokie.

"It's a lot of work," said librarian Frances Roehm, who coordinates a group of volunteers and tries to post everything residents send her. "But it's so rewarding. I'm learning so much about the community, I'm meeting so many wonderful people. And everybody loves it."

One valuable feature is a listing of blogs found in the Village, which include the muckraking Skokie Notices and Live from Skokie (sister blog of Evanston Live), which covers local events.

As elsewhere, Chicago's suburbs are seeing both top-down and bottom-up efforts to meet the need for local news coverage. At this point, there seems to room for all these efforts, and more.

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**ABOUT COMMUNITY MEDIA
WORKSHOP**

Community Media Workshop is a 20-year-old nonprofit whose mission is to diversity the voices in the news and public debates through communications coaching for some 2,000 nonprofit volunteers and staff a year, as well as sourcing and Newstips from nonprofit groups and journalists. Based at Columbia College Chicago, the Workshop can be found online at www.communitymediaworkshop.org.

The Community Media Workshop did not review or rank any of its own long-standing news sites in the interest of transparency and fairness. (The Workshop ranked #21 out of 60 sites ranked in The NEW News 2009. Recent research by Northwestern University found CommunityMediaWorkshop.org amongst the top 10 referring websites in the region.)

Newstips.org has been published since 1989 and on the web since 1996 and has a significant following amongst local reporters and community leaders. Our Chicagols TheWorld.org ethnic media blog covers issues important to the region's immigrant communities and houses our "We're Not Alone/No Estamos Solos" anti-violence project. The NPCommunicator blog is a popular site among nonprofit communications professionals in Chicago and Illinois. The ChicagoStories.org site for reporters and visitors new to Chicago attracted over 8,000 unique visitors and 40,000 page views leading up to the recent NATO Summit. The CommunityNewsProject.org blog contains commentary and links to content from the highly regarded Local Reporting Initiative, also supported by The Chicago Community Trust.

**ABOUT THE CHICAGO
COMMUNITY TRUST**

The Chicago Community Trust, our region's community foundation, partners with donors to leverage their philanthropy in ways that transform lives and communities. The Trust, together with its donors, grants more than \$100 million annually to nonprofits working to develop new audiences to sustain the region's vibrant arts organizations, protect the human services safety net for those hardest hit by the recession, stem the devastating effects of foreclosures on our neighborhoods, elevate teaching to meet world-class standards, and improve conditions for healthy and active lifestyles. By connecting the generosity of donors with the needs of the community, the Trust ensures that our region thrives today and for future generations. To learn more, please visit the Trust online at www.cct.org.

The Community News Matters program was spurred by a lead grant from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation's Knight Community Information Challenge. It seeks to increase the flow of truthful, accurate and insightful news and information in the region and spur development of new business models for news. The Knight Community Information Challenge is a five-year, \$24 million effort to help community and place-based foundations find creative ways to use new media and technology to keep residents informed and engaged.

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