

# Social networked news: a tool for better journalism

## Facebook vs. social-networked news

When thinking of social networking as a tool, ignore the models set forth by leisure applications like Facebook, MySpace and Ning. Think of social networked news as a way to report the news with efficiency and accuracy by finding people with specific interests, needs, concerns and news habits. Think of it as a way to instantly make an intimate connection with people without knocking on every door of every reader. Think of it as a tool for better journalism.

## Shotgun vs. sniper

Standard newspapering practices are to shoot a shotgun of content at your city in hopes to hit a wide audience of people. This gives way to the lowest-common denominator theory of content production. Instead, use social networking to communicate with readers not only to find story ideas and sources but to discover ways to cover a story for your audience, not your editor. The instant technology of forums and blogging allow you to understand a community's perspective before approaching sources, developing an angle and crafting a nutgraf. You can now sniper your audience with information that is more poignant, relevant and smart with what you've learned from them.

## Hyperlocal vs. hypertribal

Social networking applications allow you to identify readers with related interests despite their locations. Just because people live in X community doesn't mean they share the same interests in everything. Politics and economics are generally geographic but career goals, lifestyle choices, sports preferences, etc. are not. Use social networking to identify and group "tribes" to harvest information from readers and feed them in a more relevant and useful way.

## Just beginning, middle, no end

Instead of writing something with a beginning, middle and end, you can realistically portray a story's life and continue to grow it based on "tribes" who are continuously affected by something. Watch a story develop and find ways for your "tribes" to get involved through social networking. An issue that normally would die after a few episodes can live on and grow into mature and intelligent series over a longer period of time.

## The three users

Newspapers should briefly train everyone to professionally interact with users online. By engaging users objectively during a conversation, journalists can improve their relationships with readers and learn to cover issues at a much deeper, relevant level and cut down on nasty comments.

**Troll:** We all know these vile people who take pleasure in the destruction of ideas and emotions. Not worth your time. Ignore at all costs.

**Surfer:** This person is mostly interested in having an opinion. They're curious to see where the conversation goes but don't have an invested stake in it and aren't terribly interested in feedback. Generally pleasant. The internet is made up of these people by the millions.

**Contributor:** Coddle these people. They want information and they want to be able to use it. Many of these users lash out in frustration due to lack of knowledge/common language or from an incomplete or poorly written story. Further journalist interaction will help progress a conversation and lead people to find more, complete answers. Join forces with surfers and contributors to gain credibility with readers by increasing the quality of journalism produced.