

## **“Preditors” : Making citizen journalism work.**

**Abstract:** *Although there is great interest in citizen journalism services that harness user-generated content, the continuing contribution of professional staff who coordinate such efforts is often overlooked. This paper offers a typology of the work of the professional “preditors” who continue to operate at the heart of “pro-am” journalism initiatives. It shows that their work takes place along four dimensions – content work, networking, community work and tech work. It suggests that this is a structural change in journalistic practice, which has implications for journalists’ professional identity and journalism education.*

**Keywords:** citizen journalism, preditor, practice-based research, journalism, Web 2.0.

### ***Citizen Journalism , Web 2.0 and the limits of the crowd***

As interest grows in “citizen journalism” and user-generated news content, parallel forms of professional practice are emerging among those charged with facilitating amateur news production. But for now, these are easy to miss. Independent online initiatives and, increasingly, established news organizations have successfully experimented with user-generated content, but layers of professional supervision and coordination are often hidden from view in key debates. Few successful citizen journalism websites thrive on the efforts of users alone, and most incorporate small professional teams that coordinate, manage, publicise and contribute to news services. Bringing this kind of work to light will enable more informed discussions of possible futures in this area – both for citizen journalism initiatives, and for the profession of journalism.

Many recent citizen journalism initiatives have been premised on

*crowdsourcing*. As Margaret Simons puts it,

Crowdsourcing is the idea that a crowd of people, geographically dispersed but sharing common purpose, can achieve things better or differently to small groups of professionals and gatekeepers. It is the idea behind Wikipedia, but also many other internet enabled ventures. Why not journalism as well? (2008)

The transition from “journalism as a lecture” to “journalism as a conversation” (Gilmor, 2006), depends on bringing a community of engaged users to news production, not just as readers but as content makers. The push for more dialogic models of news, and citizen journalism, is as Flew (2008) points out, is associated with the uptake of Internet technologies that allow open publishing, collaborative editing and distributed content, and also with questioning of the “claims to uniqueness” of journalism as a profession. Sometimes, the example of other forms of user-generated content production has encouraged the belief that citizen journalism services can be conducted under a model in which content production and community management is imagined as falling to the community itself.

Of course, any citizen journalism project worthy of its name must actively seek user-generated news content, and should be underpinned by an acknowledgement of the value of expanding the range of voices involved in news production and democratic deliberation. But for the moment, citizen journalism cannot do without the ongoing input of

professionals. It is increasingly clear that to succeed, or even just to persist, crowdsourced citizen journalism projects must rely extensively on the work and leadership of a professional core team.

A “pro-am” model that mixes user-generated content with the output of professional project workers is the one that international experience suggests as the most viable. This has also been called “semi-pro” journalism, which “[combines] the ground work of average citizens or inexperienced journalists with editorial and production expertise of professional journalists.” (Glaser, 2008a) This mix underpins the most successful and enduring examples of crowdsourced citizen journalism services. A good example is OhMyNews, the leading Korean citizen journalism service, which mixes professional and amateur journalism, strong editorial oversight, and professional site and content management. Leaving aside successful precedents, incorporating the work of a coordinating professional team is seen as necessary by many due to what Simons describes as the “limitations of the crowd”, which are becoming apparent in a range of experiments in citizen journalism.

Jeff Howe, who coined the term crowdsourcing as a way of describing one affordance of new collaborative, online platforms, in late 2007 had occasion to reflect on the limits of the unaided capacities of any user-base that might be brought to participatory journalism. In assessing the “useful failure” of the citizen journalism initiative Assignment Zero – a collaborative project between *Wired* and Jay Rosen’s New Assignment

to provide a platform for collaborative, pro-am reporting – Howe wrote,

Crowdsourcing projects are generally characterized as being the product of a few super-contributors and a mass of people who contribute some minor bits. I've heard this called the "dirty little secret of open source," the fact that most of the heavy lifting is done, not by the crowd per se, but by a few select individuals from within the crowd. I'd like to posit another rule: Any crowdsourcing project must install one go-to guy (or girl) who will thanklessly toil day and night to keep the project on the rails. (Howe, 2007).

Super-contributors – a small subset of the user-base – are important, but only professional team members can keep the project “on the rails”. Taking the example of Assignment Zero’s own go-to person, “half geek, half journalist” David Cohn, Howe remarks that anyone in such a role might be expected to “customize [software], play Webmaster, manage the content on the site and play point person for a wide variety of volunteers and contributors” (Ibid).

It is not just coordination that pros in citizen journalism provide; they also need to make content. There is a tension – explored throughout this paper – between the needs of any online journalism community *qua* contributors, and their needs *qua* readers. Expanding the range of democratic voices is of limited value if a site gets no readers, and attracting readers to a site is in any case a prerequisite for recruiting a core of producers. Unfortunately, there is no guarantee that citizen

journalists – often volunteers – will reach a point where they can produce high-quality content that draw a readership on its own account.

Marc Cooper, a citizen journalism advocate and experimentalist, describes the difficulty:

Where we've had the biggest problem [in citizen journalism initiatives] is assuming that untrained citizen reporters can quickly and adequately replace professional and trained reporters... We do ourselves a lot of damage if we underestimate the training and professional rigors of journalism. I'm talking about the standards and training that go into building a journalist. Journalists don't just come off the shelf. (Qtd in Glaser, 2008b)

For citizen journalism services to prosper, a relatively small core of “go-to” professionals need to offer content *and* coordination as a core element of a broader community effort.

As more crowdsourced citizen journalism projects and services are launched – masterminded by activists, scholars, entrepreneurs and established mainstream media organizations – within the typically small core professional teams facilitating the services, a new hybrid form of “media work” (Deuze, 2007) is becoming important. Exploring this work can balance the assumptions that many carry about the possibilities for citizen journalism, in the Web 2.0 era. But it can also inform reflections about changing professional roles and identities for journalists, and suggest models for journalism teaching and scholarship.

This paper develops practice-based insights – derived from running the Australian citizen journalism project [youdecide2007.org](http://youdecide2007.org) – in acknowledging this hybrid form of cultural labour. It draws on the vocabulary of media researchers who have previously recognized the emergence of hybrid forms of media work and content production. Hartley's (2004) notion of *redaction* – “the creative *editorial* practice of bringing existing materials together to make new texts and meanings” – as a characteristic mode of postmodern media practice, though very broad, seems to anticipate at least some of the distinguishing features of this role. Closer still, and the one that this paper will favour, is Miller's notion of the “preditor” (Miller, 2007), a neologism combining “producer” and “editor”, and encompassing those “new media employees who perform both production and editorial roles. [This is] an emblem of the shift toward media industries as content producing and organizing, rather than the production of new and original cultural works.” (Carah, 2008) This paper gives specialized senses to “producing”, “editing” and “organizing”, and applies the “preditor” concept to the complex role of facilitating “journalism as a conversation” at the heart of an online community.

This paper shows that this kind of work has important similarities with, but equally important departures from more established forms of journalism. The professional skills and some of the ethos of traditional journalism remain relevant. Preditors must be comfortable with writing

and editing copy, be cognizant of publishing law and regulation, have a strong sense of news values, and be committed to ethical standards, balance and fairness in their own practice. But other skills, not traditionally part of the journalist's repertoire, come into play. The set of technological literacies required of predators partly overlaps with that of contemporary journalism. But predators must have the ability to establish collaborative interpersonal and professional relationships, and webs of content syndication, across the online news environment. They must also have the capacity to serve, guide and sometimes manage a content-making community that includes not just readers, but users who have become, in effect, colleagues.

Running crowdsourced citizen journalism services is also related to, but distinct from, contemporary online practices like blogging. Although it may resemble it in "self-publishing" news or commentary generated by amateurs, it is essentially focused on drawing together a large community of contributors, and involves distinctive skills and disciplines. While some writers operating as individuals in the contemporary networked news environment might be "living on the border between blogger and journalist" (Glaser, 2008a), the predator goes beyond this and needs to function at the centre of a news-making community.

Generalising from the experience of running the youdecide2007 project, this paper outlines a typology of labour for the predators who must facilitate and promote the creation of user-generated news content.

These interrelated categories of work, or dimensions of the predictor's role, are (i) *networking*, (ii) *community work*, (iii) *content work* and (iv) *tech work*. In the course of running a project, or even in completing particular tasks, predictors will work in all four areas. The paper shows that these are not contingent aspects of youdecide2007, but represent a necessary mutation of journalistic practice as more projects and organizations move to harness the creativity of citizen journalists. The last part of the paper briefly considers some of the implications of this for the politics of "media work", and for media and the training and identity of journalists.

### ***Youdecide 2007 - Rationale and model.***

Youdecide2007 was the first phase in an Australian Research Council - funded Industry Linkage project, involving Queensland University of Technology's Creative Industries Faculty (QUT CIF), On Line Opinion (OLO), Australia's Special Broadcasting Service (SBS), Cisco Systems and the Brisbane Institute. Each of these partners, from their own point of view, has a strong interest in understanding the dynamics and potential of online citizen journalism. The larger project (which is ongoing at the time of writing) is a wide-ranging investigation of the emerging practices and technologies of citizen-led, online public affairs reporting, including citizen journalism, but also opinion-blogging, online



political communication and related changes in politics and the public sphere. Part of the project's scope is a programme of action research in citizen journalism. The rationale for practice-based research is in the unique insights it promises at a point when citizen journalism remains a very fluid, developmental phenomenon.

What insights did we hope to glean? First, we knew that running a citizen journalism site would provide rich information on the likely *audience*, or base of “producers” for such initiatives, and allow us to understand something about the dynamics of citizen journalism communities. Such practical initiatives also allow experimentation with *new forms of news coverage*. In *youdecide2007*, the project team was interested in trying out emerging models of online news, including the site-level aggregation of hyperlocal content sourced at the level of the electorate or constituency, in this way providing a “bottom-up” counterpoint to the “presidential” narratives of the mainstream media. Another key area of interest was in discovering what kinds of *relationships* exist, or are possible, between independent, online news media (including citizen journalism initiatives) and mainstream media news services.

Most importantly for this paper, it was seen that running a citizen journalism site offers a “royal road” to understanding what the work of facilitating citizen journalism consists in. Through reflecting on our work in building and running the service, we hoped we would be able to

speak to changes in the nature of media work as news goes online, and as “the people formerly known as the audience” (Rosen, 2006) are brought within the fold as contributors to independent and commercial news production.

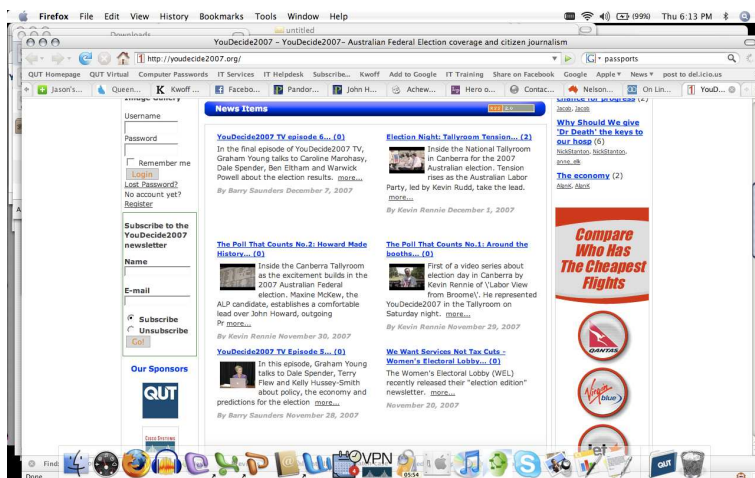
The service’s website and its support systems were designed, then, for a hybrid purpose. Partly, we needed to address the pragmatics of building a working online citizen journalism community: our site needed to be able to host multimedia content, facilitate community interaction, be user-friendly, allow the processing of content in a way that suited staff and users, ensuring that we met all legal and ethical obligations. It needed to be delivered within a relatively short time frame and within the constraints of the project’s resources. Besides working well as a service, it also had to enable subsequent research in each of the project’s key areas of interest.

These principles were translated into a working site that was launched in September 2007, well before the campaign proper and the election, held on the 23rd of November. Some relevant features are discussed in detail further on the paper in the typology of predictor labour. Briefly, though, the open-source content management system, Joomla! was employed, and heavily customized to allow the submission of multimedia content through the public areas of the site as well as editorial work in the “back end”. Statistics modules were included so that user activity could be tracked during and after the site’s active life.

The aggregated-hyperlocal, electorate-level model for our coverage informed the design and layout of the site – “hard” news content was near the top of the front page, and opinion pieces and media releases were further down. The site had static pages linked to from the front page, which contained technical and legal information, explanations of the initiative, details on licensing and privacy, and guidance in journalistic practice. Users were able to comment on stories, and recent comments were flagged on the front page.



**Figure 1** Front page of Youdecide2007



**Figure 2 Front page of Youdecide2007**

Before and during its active life, a core team managed the day-to-day operation of the site. This team had three full-time, or near-full-time contributors in On Line Opinion's director Graham Young, Barry Saunders, a QUT PhD candidate with extensive experience as a journalist, and the author as project manager. Additional important day-to-day contributions came from Kelly Hussey-Smith, a part-time worker on the project with skills in photojournalism, and Chris Maj, the web developer at OLO, who continued to maintain and modify the site throughout the campaign. Further contributions, especially in the planning stages, were made by senior project team members from QUT CIF – Terry Flew, Axel Bruns, Stuart Cunningham – and SBS – Georgie McLean, Bruce Meagher and Heidi Lenffer – though this latter group largely took a “hands-off” approach to the day-to-day running of the site during the election.

Throughout its active life, the site got around 2000 registered users,

who submitted some 230 stories. We received stories from over one third of Australia's 150 electorates, and citizen journalists submitted print, video, audio and photographic materials. At its peak, the site attracted over 12,000 readers a week, and got more traffic than all but one of the major political parties' sites. It broke stories that were picked up by the national press, and was able to send a correspondent to the National Tally Room on election night. Although ambitions for such services tend to be high, youdecide2007 was considered a successful effort as a citizen journalism service, especially in the Australian context, where little has been attempted in this area.

The team charged with day-to-day management carried out a range of different, but interlocking forms of cultural labour. The typology of predictor labour that the rest of the paper sets out generalizes from this experience. Although it has been developed with reference to the youdecide2007 experience, it is relevant to any service that uses a small team to manage or facilitate amateur journalism. Given that, along with independent start-ups, mainstream media organizations are now moving urgently to accommodate citizen journalism and user-generated content (Thurman, 2008), the account that follows is a description of a form of labour that is increasingly important across all venues where news is published.

***Content work.***

The first major form of work that predators need to carry out is *content work*: editing and producing original content for a citizen journalism service. Not that this includes editing *and* making content - both ensuring that user-submitted stories meet legal, regulatory, ethical and quality requirements, and providing original “pro” content that drives visits, publicity, syndications and, in turn, further contributions to the site. This is the dimension of preditorial work that most closely resembles traditional journalism, but it differs in its aims and in the context in which it is carried out. Rather than delivering news content to a website which is “just another channel” for journalists’ output (Mattin, 2005), predators are focussed – even in their own content making – on boosting a service that exists to draw in and sustain a pro-am newsmaking *community*.

Predators primary area of content work is in the editorial supervision of citizen journalists’ contributions. Although editing user-generated content might seem to be at odds with some conceptions of Web 2.0, citizen journalism does not take place in a legal vacuum, and is not sacrosanct when it comes to publishing law or media regulation. Laws and regulations can vary widely between jurisdictions, and untrained journalists may not be aware of what kinds of material, when published, is potentially actionable.

In Australia, although defamation laws have since 2005 been simplified and nationally standardized, and truth in reporting is now an absolute defence against defamation action, the range of what can safely be published is still generally recognized as being more restricted than it is, for example, in the United States.<sup>1</sup> When it comes to online news, there are strong indications in this country that publishers may be liable even for user comments that are published on their site, and there are legal precedents establishing that material published online in other territories is actionable under Australian defamation law.<sup>2</sup> Other laws prohibiting vilification, as well as certain branches of electoral law governing the publication and authorization of content during election campaigns, mean that publication is always hedged in by legal constraints, and needs to be supervised by people who understand them. If it is not, a very real risk is presented for the organizers of citizen journalism services and the amateur journalists who use their services.

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<sup>1</sup> See Majoribanks and Kenyon and Kenyon and Majoribanks for in-depth surveys of the pre-reform differences between defamation laws in the USA and Australia.

<sup>2</sup> On the issue of users comments being defamatory, there is no formal precedent in Australia at this point, but there are reasons to be very nervous about the publication of comments. In July 2007 the *Sydney Daily Telegraph* settled out of court for A\$480,000 with a group of lawyers who alleged that they had been defamed by the paper, in part by a story as published, but largely by the user comments the paper allowed to be appended to the online version of the story. See Crabb (2007) for a report on this incident.

On the issue of being defamed by material published online, but outside the jurisdiction of a court, a clear precedent has been set. Prominent Australian businessman Joseph Gutnick was found to be defamed by a piece published online from the United States, and a Victorian court held that the matter was actionable in Victoria. See Beyer for extended discussion of this ruling. The ruling puts paid to earlier speculations that Australian writers and publishers might take advantage of “defamation havens” overseas to publish online with impunity (See Martin (2000) for an earlier articulation of this possibility).

Clearly, editing according to Web 2.0 principles – with user voting or post-moderation – could offer only limited or erratic protection from litigation or prosecution for the publishers or legal owners of online news sites. A defamatory item, for example, could remain on a site for an extended period before any user read it closely, or understood that it was actionable. Meanwhile, the item might have been read by the wider public, the person defamed by the story, and their lawyers. It is not at all clear in Australia that removal within “reasonable” time limits will work as a defence, and it is obviously much safer to stop actionable material before it is published on the website. Such legal considerations go to sustainability: not pre-editing user-generated material risks putting a service, its employees and its community at risk, either of closure, severe financial penalties or more serious forms of legal sanction. The need for user submissions to be thoroughly checked for defamatory, vilifying or otherwise problematic material means that an editorial team must be trained and competent to assess the legal risk inherent in any story.

Beyond legal concerns, depending on the nature of the service, there will often be a case for editing user submissions for accuracy and clarity of expression. A purist adherence to Web 2.0 principles might preclude gatekeepers altering users’ copy prior to publication, and it is of course possible to put structures in place that allow users themselves to make judgements about the quality of articles after they appear. But



youdecide2007 users themselves often expressly asked for editorial help, and could be seen as a courtesy to contributors to correct simple errors, or make suggestions about how stories can be made more effective. Preditors are always under pressure balance the needs of readers and active contributors – editing for quality can serve readers better, may bring more readers in and thus enlarge the community of readers and contributors. If editing for quality ensures a better reception for users' contributions, it could be argued that it is in their interests, too. Some users may voice concerns about free expression during editing, but clear communication between preditors and users usually overcomes this. Although editing for quality places greater demands on the time of a small team, a number of considerations suggest that it is often necessary and appropriate.

It is telling that enduring and successful citizen journalism initiatives like OhMyNews and OhMyNews International carry out similar editorial procedures to the ones we used in running youdecide2007. OhMyNews spells out on its website the reasons for rejecting stories – including defamation and quality issues – and asks contributors to adhere to a code of ethics and a reporter's agreement in submitting material for the site (OhMyNews International). Although OhMyNews' payment system has received attention, only material specially selected by editorial staff can receive payment. Paid content is a very small proportion of what makes it onto the website, but a sizeable amount of submitted content is

not published at all. As Jean K. Min, OhMyNews's communications director, put it in an interview in 2007

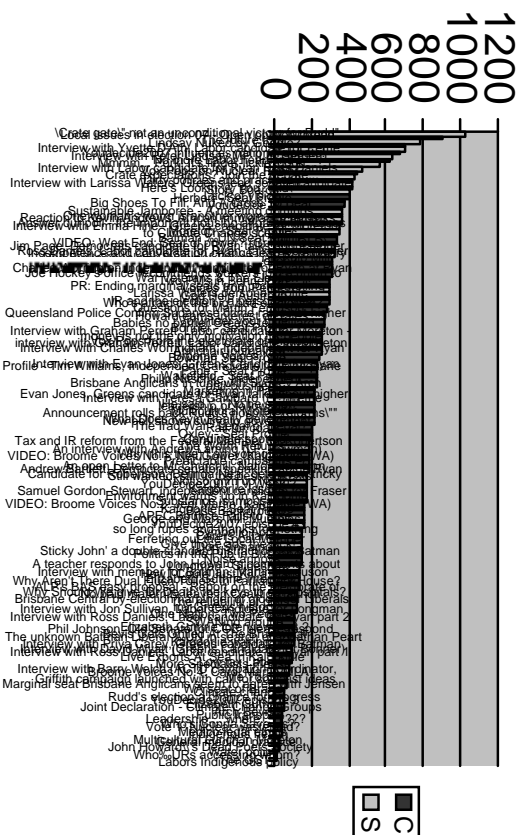
Citizen reporters have to persuade OhmyNews' front-line copy editors to have their stories accepted in the first place. As much as 30 percent of daily submissions are rejected for various reasons such as poor sentence construction, factual errors, or its lack of news value. After stories are accepted and edited, then placed in a more prominent space, usually within minutes they draw feedback from scores of readers. (Lasica and Lee (2007))

The need to exercise editorial judgement over user-submitted copy, which necessary and common in a range of citizen journalism initiatives, means that the skills and professional competencies of traditional journalism have continuing relevance in this space, even though the context, and the kind of material they will be dealing with, may be quite different to that of more traditional forms of journalism.

Checking submissions for actionable, inaccurate or inelegant material may constitute a significant proportion of predators' content work, but they will also need to write stories of their own. In doing this, they can help to draw a community to the site, provide models of practice for citizen journalists, and get attention for their initiative in the broader mediasphere. During the life of youdecide2007, the core team generated "seed content" to ensure the site did not launch as an empty shell, but also in the hope that stories present at launch would guide our

citizen journalists in developing their own material. We continued to make contributions throughout the life of the site, in part because we needed to guarantee a steady flow of content, even during those times when citizen contributions had temporarily dried up. When we came to assess the impact of citizen-generated content versus staff-generated content, we found that our “pro” stories had played a crucial role in drawing eyeballs, and an interactive readership, to the site.

The graph below shows the popularity of stories published to the site, in terms of unique page visits, and distinguishes between “pro” and “am” content: staff-generated content is marked in light grey, citizen-generated content in dark grey. What it shows is that the most-read stories were, for the most part, generated by the pros: eight of the site’s ten most visited stories were produced by staff members. This was not necessarily reflected in the number of comments that particular stories attracted – indeed, relative to hits, citizen-generated stories tended to receive more comments than staff pieces. But it does show that part of the site’s “stickiness” – its ability to drag in readers who may be potential contributors – was attributable to pro content. The question that immediately arises from this realization is how staff and citizen stories differed from one another.



As with the remainder of the site's news content, staff contributions were multimedia, including written work, photography, and video. The question of how they differed from user contributions is therefore not simple. In general, though, staff contributions more nearly approached the "production values" of mainstream media reporting. Staff stories more closely resembled industrial journalism in the lighting and framing of photographs, the shooting and editing of video, and the style and angles pursued in written pieces. This was unsurprising, given the journalistic training and experience of the preditorial team.

In a sense, then, staff stories were closer to what the site's audience were accustomed to consuming as news. This claim does not imply a value-judgement. A justified ambition of many citizen journalism

advocates is to change conventions of reportage, and to celebrate the innovative approaches of untrained journalists to their subjects. But the audience's appreciation of the stylistics of "am" forms of citizen journalism may take time to acquire. Meanwhile, "pro" content can draw a readership in search of "industry-standard" news stories. That audience might then be drawn further into the site to read citizen stories, or even to sign up as contributors. By approximating the conventions of mainstream media news, pro content is a driver of the growth of citizen journalism communities. Again, this suggests an enduring relevance for traditional journalistic skills in the era of citizen journalism.

The second way in which the pro content resembled the output of the mainstream media was in terms of its "newsworthiness". Though there were many exceptions, citizen content on youdecide2007 tended to be more opinionated, less focused on setting out issues with clarity, less concerned with bringing new material to light, and less attuned to the characteristics of the stories that "break" in the mainstream media.

Once again, this should not be seen as a value judgement. Part of the argument often for stimulating citizen journalism is that the news values of the mainstream media no longer (or never did) reflect the priorities of the citizenry, that industrial news values – in their focus on "gaffes" and conflict – distort democratic politics, and that the time has come for the restoration (or institution) of more deliberative, dialogic forms of political

information and communication. But anyone running a citizen journalism service is faced with the pragmatics of getting attention for their site, drawing readers in, and assembling a community of contributors. It is not simply that reproducing mainstream news values might fit better with the “generic expectations” of the audience, but that crafting stories that are targeted to mainstream news values might bring about precious exposure for the service in the mainstream media.

It is undoubtedly true that “big media” exposure is the most important way of getting notice for citizen journalism sites. This was brought home to everyone working on youdecide2007 on a number of occasions throughout the campaign. The benefits of getting mainstream attention are discussed further in the following section on “networking”, but some of the more important episodes of media exposure came from stories written by staff. In particular, a “gotcha” story featuring the Liberal member for Herbert, Peter Lindsay, became the basis of a question asked in the Parliament by then Leader of the Opposition, Kevin Rudd, and was then picked up by Associated Press, the national Fairfax Press, and eventually became a “meta-story” about the impact of citizen journalism in the election campaign in feature reports in *The Age* and *Crikey*. This led to a clear spike in registrations and contributions on the site, but it worked well as an attention-getter because it played to the conflictual, fact-based and gaffe-oriented values of industrial journalism, and to the instincts of a political organization in campaign mode. This

was a staff story (in this case by the author), but throughout the campaign we were unable to get similar interest in (arguably more honourably-framed) citizen stories, which did not appeal to the same priorities. An understanding of mainstream news values is another attribute of the professional journalist's kit-bag that continues to have relevance in the coordination and promotion of citizen journalism services, because it allows pro staff to make content that draws greater numbers and more attention to the community by making an impact in other media channels.

If pros are to generate stories that approximate industrial aesthetics and news values, the necessary corollary is that they must, to some extent, persist with traditional journalistic newsgathering practices. Over the life of the site, the youdecide2007 team carried out in-person and telephone audio and video interviews with politicians and opinion-leaders, which were edited and posted to the site. They attended press conferences, public forums and other campaign events. They gathered vox pops on hot-button issues, and researched and wrote stories in various genres – hard news, features and op-ed pieces. Understanding the sources of news, the progress of campaigns, the disciplines of newsgathering, and the presentation of news in different formats – all traditional journalistic attributes – is crucial to operating successfully as a content-making predator in pro-am citizen journalism.

The need for predators' original content does not end with stories: in the

case of youdecide2007 “meta-content” was produced, including a user manual explaining the use of sites, and the concept of citizen journalism itself, to users. But it is enough to have noted here that when in crowdsourced citizen journalism, the ongoing content work of editing user content and producing original content is crucial, both for the protection of publishers and users, and in order to bring readers and users to a service. Once again, this suggests a strong, continuing relevance for traditional newsgathering and reporting skills – eliciting amateur content seems to be made easier when predators produce material with a professional look and feel. Notwithstanding the noted difficulty of integrating user-generated content with professional content (Thurman, 2008), predators must ensure that their site has plenty of both, and that they are playing their part in the community’s production of content.

### ***Networking***

Predators need to take on a number of tasks that connect their service with a range of people, and other venues for news, within what has been called the “networked news environment” (Russell et al, 2006) or the “ecosystem of journalism” (Gilmor, qtd in Jardin, 2004). Under the rubric of networking is the work of making advantageous connections with existing, established online and offline news outlets, of ensuring



that content is delivered and sourced across a number of platforms, and of entrepreneurially mobilizing on- and offline networks. All this is done in order to bring users and content to a site. The nature of online publishing and citizen journalism demands that predators think of their services not just as simply another channel for citizen-led content, but as *relationally* integrated in a broader ecology of mainstream and independent news. The brutal realities of what Hindman (2008) calls the “winner takes all” economy of online news (Hindman, 2008) means that any citizen journalism initiative must work very hard to get attention, and to draw the produser audience it needs in order to be viable. On-site content needs to be repurposed and republished to give stories and the service a higher visibility. And existing contacts can be tapped for content, participation, or simply to spread the word about a service. In the context of an election campaign, the demand for political news might be high, but the sources for such information also expand. Getting noticed requires establishing collaborative relationships, especially with sections of the mediasphere that some advocates of citizen journalism would see as being in need of replacement.

Although the “mainstream media” attains the status of a folk devil in some sections of the blogosphere, and among some advocates of citizen journalism, the diverse channels of industrial journalism, with their mass audiences, remain the best way of getting information to potential readers and users. Although doubtless a minority of journalists

view the rise of citizen-led media with unmixed horror (and the author has received first-hand expressions of such dismay), during the course of our experiment, we were met mostly with courtesy and curiosity on the part of professional journalists. Since citizen journalism is itself still a “story”, we were able to arrange a number of media appearances – mostly on radio – that gave us space to explain the project, and let people know how they could get involved. In these instances, and when we were able to break stories that attracted the mainstream media’s interest, we were always rewarded with spikes in registration, and (at a slight delay) an increase in submitted stories, ensuring the ongoing viability of the service. But taking advantage of these media opportunities requires that predators have appropriate communication skills – a punchy, “soundbite” summary of the nature of their project, and how people can get involved, is essential to maximizing the impact of electronic media appearances.

If the mainstream media can help citizen journalism services survive and prosper, rather than viewing them with suspicion, it is incumbent on the predator to make and cultivate contacts among professional journalists and political operatives. In breaking the story about Peter Lindsay, I was able to use contacts within the Australian Labor Party to ask them directly for a reaction to some ill-advised remarks on housing affordability on Mr Lindsay’s part that I had recorded and published. This was in turn fed up through succeeding echelons of the Labor Party,

traveled into the Parliament, and then cascaded out through the outlets of the mainstream media. This in turn produced more contacts when media outlets called us to confirm the story, or to ask about youdecide2007 as a project. As a result of this, several pieces were published in which the site itself was the story, which in turn brought more visibility and more users. If predators can come to regard the mainstream media as a source of assistance and collaboration rather than as an ideological enemy or competitor, they will be better able to attract users to their site. The cultivation and maintenance of contacts – often seen as a primary duty of the journalist – is also a key concern for those facilitating citizen journalism.

Content, too, should be repurposed and re-used across platforms to raise the visibility of citizen journalism services. The licensing arrangements used by a particular site are important here, and without a Creative Commons license, or some arrangement that allows wider republication, content may not be portable. But if arrangements for re-use are in place, material can be ported across a number of platforms. At a minimum, reposting videos to YouTube, using social bookmarking services like Digg to draw searches to the site, reposting on social networking services like Facebook, and using trackback links to relevant blog entries will all get added value from a story.

It is also incumbent on the predator to try to source content from across the networked news environment that might be re-used on their own

site. Making contact with bloggers who are writing in the area that the service is covering can yield high-quality content from experienced writers, and republication can also benefit the original authors by giving them a bigger readership. Of course, permission will need to be sought, and a strong collaborative relationship established, but using this kind of material can help bulk the archive of the service, and can also serve to make the flow of content onto the site steadier. Often, bloggers themselves will advertise republication when it takes place. This will publicise the predator's service to their own readers. Material from Australian bloggers was used extensively throughout the life of youdecide2007.

Predators should be alive to cross-media opportunities that may arise. During the life of youdecide2007, we were fortunate enough, via Graham Young, to receive an offer to produce an election-oriented panel programme for Brisbane community television station, 31. Barry Saunders and Graham produced the show, and it foregrounded user content from the site by using videos and stories as the basis for discussion. The programme featured local experts, and in terms of community television it was a ratings success. This initiative gave the site yet more exposure, drew more users and contributions, and expanded the scope of the entire initiative into a multi-platform venture. The programmes themselves were reposted to the site and to YouTube, and thereby constituted "bonus" content for the service.

If predators think about their service as embedded in a networked news environment, the benefits of publishing material in other outlets, to raise awareness of their service, become obvious. Doing so can build the profile and credibility of their service. During the administration of youdecide2007, members of the core team wrote material for a range of other mainstream and independent news services and blogs. When writing for outlets including *Crikey*, *ABC Online*, *New Matilda*, *On Line Opinion* and *Larvatus Prodeo*, team members were always careful to have their involvement in youdecide2007 flagged. We were also fortunate that Graham Young was able to advertise the initiative to his significant On Line Opinion audience and “What the People Want” qualitative polling panelists – this promotion alone brought hundreds of readers and several contributors to the site.

Spreading awareness about a site is interdependent with bringing in readers and content. Any publicity will bring the users that provide stories, content, and dynamic community on their site. Though some bloggers and citizen journalism advocates might express hostility towards the mainstream media, predators should establish collaborative or cooperative relationships with existing media outlets, and do their best to link their site with established outlets in the networked news environment.

### ***Community work***

Preditors' community work includes all efforts to bring people to their service, and to keep communities engaged with on-site content and one another. Essentially, community work is community service. The provision of a certain level of service for users is not only the best way to influence the tone of stories and debate on the site, but it is also the best way to promote user retention and the growth of communities. The assumption that a site based on user-generated content will naturally develop its own emergent ethos can obscure the fact – brought home by youdecide2007 – that users have needs that site staff are best placed to cater for. Users do not bring equal levels of skill, experience or (unfortunately) goodwill to citizen journalism services, and as a result communities or individual users and the community need educators and honest brokers. Preditors are also the best placed to make most of the gestures, and perform most of the tasks, that build a sense of community

Users' needs can be broadly divided into three categories. Generalising from our youdecide2007 experience, preditors need to provide their community with (i) *training*, (ii) *site-specific information*, and (iii) *mediation*. Training involves passing on all of the digital and informational literacies that are required for participating in a service, at whatever level of involvement. This might involve teaching users how to post content, how to register or comment, or how to use linked off-site technologies like digital editing technologies or YouTube. It may involve

coaching users in producing compelling news. Site-specific information can include clarification of the nature and purpose of the service, explanations of intellectual property arrangements, or details on editing processes. Some users may lack the “soft skills” that smooth online interaction, which is why mediation is also important. Preditors can defuse flame wars in comments threads, respond to objections about the thrust of specific stories, and, at worst, make decisions to ban particularly offensive users.

The best way to deal with users’ needs is, of course, to anticipate them. Ideally, a site’s creators can address users’ needs structurally, with built-in features of the service. Even before a citizen journalism service has launched, preditors who have some input into its conception and design can put support structures in place to ensure, as far as is possible, the smooth running of the community.

In the case of youdecide2007, a user manual was offered for download that explained the technology we were using, the service’s framework of rights and responsibilities, and aspects of newsgathering and news writing. Intellectual property issues, terms of use and other legal matters were further spelled out on static pages linked off the front page. We gave community rules in several places, to try to minimize conflict, and to avoid having to take comments down or ban users. Processes of editing and moderation were explained in the manual and on the site, and contact details were publicised in case of further queries. A weekly

newsletter, sent to registered users throughout the campaign, was used to inform users of stories, promotional events and regular features, and to respond to user feedback. These regular communications from the core team were also aimed at building a sense of community and purpose among users.

Of course, users' potential needs or problems cannot all be anticipated. Some users will have specific problems that can only be dealt with on a one-on-one basis. Not all users will have all their technical questions answered by a manual. There are occasional glitches in the processes of even the best-run site, and it is often users who discover them. Some users will object strongly to particular stories, and some will have had their work edited or rejected because they did not satisfy site rules, standards of quality or laws around publishing. A user may have specific requests around the terms under which their material is published, and some will require intensive feedback and comments on their submitted work. A comment from site staff can often defuse an incendiary thread, and when this fails particular users may have to be counseled off-thread, or even banned. In all of these cases, predators will need to engage directly with users, in sometimes-protracted exchanges via the site, through email, and occasionally via telephone or messaging services.

Importantly, predators also need to make special efforts with the community's "super-contributors" – that relatively small group who, as



pointed out in Jeff Howe's remarks quoted earlier in the paper – provide the bulk of the content for any service. Such users often quite properly come to have feelings of ownership over the initiative to which they have contributed so much material. Often, in turn, this leads them to claim a certain intimacy with the professional core members of a service, and to communicate frequently with them. Even if they do not take the initiative in this way, it is important that predators make such “power users” feel welcome, and make it clear that their efforts are appreciated. After the professional staff themselves, it is they who contribute the most to the ongoing life citizen journalism communities. During youdecide2007, we were able to reward one “super-contributor” with a trip to Canberra to cover election night at the Tally Room for the service, but all high-frequency contributors were cultivated by the project team.

### ***Tech work***

Citizen journalism is an essentially online phenomenon, driven by the affordances of Internet technologies. For predators, a working knowledge of a range of digital technologies underpins all of their work. Whether in generating and editing content, raising the profile of the site across the networked media environment, or in serving and managing the user community, a basic set of technological literacies is essential. Technical proficiencies are crucial to building and improving the service,

and in assessing its impact. For a service like youdecide2007, every aspect of running the service is imbricated with uses of digital technologies. Generalising from this experience, we can divide tech work into (i) on-site tech work, (ii) off-site tech work and (ii) meta-tech-work.

On-site tech work covers all technical aspects of bringing content and users to the core service. Preditors might assist in web design, and share responsibility for making the site user-friendly, both for users at the front-end and staff at the back-end. During youdecide2007, preditorial staff used the Joomla! Content management system for a range of purposes, including posting and editing multimedia content, managing user registrations, moderating comments, and communicating directly with users. As the election campaign progressed, we also used the site to conduct embedded qualitative polling. Joomla!'s site statistics were a guide to the relative popularity of particular content items, and assisted with identifying habitual readers and super-contributors. Preditors need a thorough familiarity with their service's native technology in order to successfully pursue the everyday tasks of operating an online citizen journalism service.

Off-site tech work is a more diverse category. This includes the range of technological literacies that the preditor needs in order to generate content for the site, and to promote it across the networked news environment. Preditors need to develop a variety of multimedia content

for their service, so the ability to capture and edit digital still images, video and audio is essential. In networking content, predators need to upload to and embed from content hosting services like YouTube or Flickr, and be able to write and edit text in a range of online content management systems. Being able to find and collect relevant news feeds will also be important – many of the cross-posted blogger stories on youdecide2007 were found by means of the team's RSS subscriptions, or through special Yahoo Pipes feeds set up to target special, election-related keywords. Communicating with users via email and messaging services is also important for community maintenance.

Predators will benefit from being able to perform aspects of what we might call meta-tech-work, by which they can measure the effectiveness and impact of their service. This involves making use of data generated about facts like site and server activity, users, and links. Analysis of this data lets staff understand which stories and initiatives have been popular, who their users are, and what impact their site is having. Acting on this information can ease networking, community work and content work, by letting predators know what is and is not working. Alongside user communications and other feedback mechanisms, ongoing quantitative analysis can feed into modifications of the site for the benefit of staff, users and the service as a whole.

### ***Discussion and conclusions.***

Based on the experience of running a crowdsourced citizen journalism project during the 2007 Australian Federal Election, the paper has outlined the four dimensions of hybrid, “preditorial” media work. Content work embodies the production and editing of news content. Networking means establishing interpersonal relationships and content webs across the networked media environment. Community work involves providing service to the community of contributors, commenters and readers gathered around a news platform. Tech work is the range of on- and off-site technological competencies required in online, crowdsourced citizen journalism projects.

These are not contingent or idiosyncratic aspects of youdecide2007 – these categories of labour are demanded by the nature of facilitating crowdsourced citizen journalism. Presenting and augmenting user-generated news content is the *raison d’etre* of citizen journalism initiatives. Marking the presence of such services, and drawing in content in the networked news environment is necessary for their ongoing viability. Once a community has been drawn to a site, its needs must be met. And all of these efforts are technologically mediated. Anyone involved in running a site that seeks contributions from amateur citizen journalists, especially if, as is likely, they are a part of a small team, will need to be able to support content making, to activate

interpersonal and content networks, to sustain communities, and work with a variety of on- and offline technologies.

Some of these responsibilities, it is clear, overlap with the more traditional professional role of journalists, and those with some training or experience in journalism may be best placed to carry them out. A skill-set that includes the ability to make and edit news content, an understanding of legal and ethical issues that constrain content-making, and an ability to network with media professionals and news outlets offers advantages any predator. But there are important implications for journalism in those dimensions of the predator's role that do not correspond with the established professional identity of reporters.

In particular, community management, and the knack of establishing collaborative, rather than competitive relationships across the mediasphere may be areas in which, going forward, journalists need to develop capacity. Treating untrained, amateur journalists respectfully, as colleagues, and reaching out to other media workers across services and channels requires an understanding of news production as ever-more collaborative, and of the news environment as networked, rather than as a series of competitive, exclusive outlets. Besides these areas of community work and networking, and despite the fact that technological standards are in constant flux, a realization that journalistic work is now inextricably tied in with digital content production, and requires evolving, wide-ranging technological literacies

might also be a focus of ongoing development.

As mainstream media organizations start to provide for and harness citizen journalism, and as more independent initiatives emerge, the skills of the predator may well be in high demand. Indeed, there is every reason to think that more jobs in journalism will entail operating, as a professional, at the heart of a community of amateurs, and facilitating “conversational” journalism. This constitutes an argument for including elements of the predator’s hybrid discipline in the training of journalists. Along with newswriting and newsgathering, it may be that developing journalists need to be taught how to coordinate a community of contributors, how to establish relationships across the networked news environment, and that lifelong learning in relevant technologies is essential to their evolving professional role.

Also, understanding the interdependent forms of work that predators do in underpinning citizen journalism services is important in the developing labour politics of media work. While Web 2.0 debates often efface the role of facilitating amateur content, “go-to” people are essential, and in small teams, it can often seem that their work is never done. It is essential that enterprises plan adequately for this work to be carried out. But it is equally important that the labour that underpins user-generated content is recognized as we try to understand the changing landscape of cultural production, in an era when users are gaining a more active voice in news production, but are not yet able to

shoulder all the responsibilities attached to it.

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