



## USING TECHNOLOGY TO CONNECT WITH YOUR COMMUNITIES

These journalists have all found innovative ways to incorporate technology into their reporting and writing and reporting

- **Innovations in E-mail - Ken Sands**, Managing Editor of Online and New Media with *The Spokesman-Review*

Sands recommends contacting newspaper readers by e-mail and says it offers a solution to the obstacle of newspapers being perceived as "unapproachable." In fact, this makes readers feel even more connected to the paper. He advises sending out specific e-mail messages to individuals. Why? Simply asking readers in general for story suggestions can be vague and elicit too broad of a response. Sands says that using email databases at his paper has been "wildly successful." This tool can be used in several ways, he says:

- **Finding a needle in the haystack:** The e-mail tool is useful for stories that might otherwise be dull or have no personal angle to them.
  - **When "real human" sources are hard to find:** Even e-mailing a small number of sources can generate responses that are low in quantity but high in quality.
  - **As part of breaking news coverage:** The Spokesman Review's coverage of the 9/11 attacks was enhanced by personal stories by citizens about how they were affected. Sands sent a targeted email to readers that day.
  - **Generating "person on the street" reaction:** When you want this kind of reaction, e-mail can be quicker and more efficient.
  - **Adding quality to opinion page commentary:** When the paper wasn't receiving much input on certain topics, reporters at *The Spokesman-Review* would e-mail out a list of Hot Topics to readers, asking them to comment. Editors could then include these reader reactions on the opinion page.
- **Fishing for News - Steve Gunn**, editor for new products and innovations at *The Charlotte-Observer*

Gunn advocates using an e-mail list to keep in touch with readers of the print paper. By turning to readers regularly, you can get new information and ideas for story topics the paper is missing. He says consistency with these e-mails is key. Reporters and editors should check in with people every week. This can help establish a relationship that will prove valuable if you need help on a future story. It will also give the readers more say in news content.

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- **Maintaining a Digital Database - Leigh Dyer**, newcomers reporter and editor of *Living Here* at *The Charlotte Observer* in North Carolina

Dyer's first method for acquiring sources is attending community events and reaching out to people on the street. She builds a directory of her sources and keeps track of them through an Excel spreadsheet. She also saves contact information from all reader emails that she gets and adds that to the spreadsheet. Other than giving her instant information about potential story sources, Dyer's database shows trends in the types of sources she's adding, where they live and what they're interested in.

In the summer of 2006, Dyer started writing the New Around Town blog for *The Charlotte Observer*. She's used the blog to conduct focus groups with newcomers about specific community issues and interests.