



## PR with Principles

November 2005

Welcome to the SPIN Project's e-newsletter, our monthly compendium of news, notes, and ideas....

In this issue:

- New Article: "When to Hire Communications Staff"
- Citizen Kane or Citizen Media: Some Thoughts on Engaging Citizen Journalists
- Spotlight on the New [www.spinproject.org](http://www.spinproject.org): Links and References

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New Article: "When to Hire Communications Staff"

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When to hire communications staff is one of the key questions facing organizations interested in expanding their communications efforts. The SPIN Project recently completed a short article offering some considerations to help guide that decision. A brief excerpt follows, and the full article is available from our website at:

<http://spinproject.org/downloads/Hiring.pdf>

Excerpt:

Nonprofit organizations – while eager to get the word out about their good work – must often make difficult choices when it comes to investing their limited resources. Why hire a communications director when key programs need more resources, too? It's a tough choice, but one that many groups are finding yields real payoff for their work.

Building communications capacity by bringing on dedicated staff is a significant step in the development of nonprofit organizations. More and more groups are turning to professional communications staff for assistance in publicizing their issues and engaging their audiences.

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Citizen Kane or Citizen Media: Some Thoughts on Engaging Citizen Journalists

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Rest in peace Citizen Kane, for now is the era of the citizen journalist. Big media

giants are giving way to the ordinary Joe (and JoAnne) because today, anyone with a laptop and a cell phone camera has the tools to be a journalist. And in the process, they are creating an interactive democratic form of media.

Wikipedia ([www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org)) offers this excellent definition of citizen journalism:

*“Citizen journalism usually involves empowering ordinary citizens -- including traditionally marginalized members of society -- to engage in activities that were previously the domain of professional reporters.... [J]ournalism ... "by the people" [is] enabled in part by emerging internet and networking technologies, such as weblogs, chat rooms, message boards, wikis and mobile computing.”*

In other words, it's not just for the punk rock anarchists at the Indy Media Center (<http://www.indymedia.org/en/index.shtml>) anymore. (Though your local Independent Media Center is an excellent place to start to form connections with citizen media organizations in your community.)

You may be most familiar with citizen journalism from what you saw in the coverage of the London subway bombings, (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/07/07/AR2005070701522.html>) but the citizen journalist movement really got its start in South Korea with OhMyNews. (<http://english.ohmynews.com/>) A news site with some 38,000 citizen field reporters staffing the virtual news room, OhMyNews offers a variety of points of view on the daily news, and, as such is cited as a major force in reshaping South Korea politics. <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/5240584/site/newsweek/> Even major U.S. media outlets are jumping on the bandwagon, completing their coverage with stories from citizen journalists, like this one from MSNBC. (<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/9076525/>)

What does all this mean for nonprofit organizations? As community advocates, you often have the best knowledge of and connections to matters of local importance – a huge asset for any citizen journalist. Many bloggers are now pointing to hyperlocal journalism (<http://www.radioopensource.org/hyperlocal-journalism/>) – news coverage of events at the community level, traditionally overlooked by media. Now many sites are inviting contributions from local residents of their subscription areas, who often report on topics with a ground-level perspective. Here's a hyperlocal look at Burlington, Vermont. (<http://www.iburlington.com/>) In venues like this one (<http://www.backfence.com/home/index.cfm?mycomm=BE>), you can be the primary journalist covering your organization's work.

And for many community groups, the notion of inserting a new perspective into the national dialog falls right in line with your mission and goals. If you work with constituencies like youth, or undocumented workers, or others that mainstream media tends to ignore, innovative approaches to making your own media can be an excellent outlet for your message, and the voices of your constituents. Third World Majority (<http://www.cultureisaweapon.org/about/mainframe.php3>) has pioneered community digital story telling (<http://www.cultureisaweapon.org/cdsm/mainframe.php3> ). Video Machete <http://www.videomachete.org/about.html> is another great example of a local community group using media to engage communities in creating media and culture. (<http://www.videomachete.org/projects.html>)

## Resources

So, you want to give it a shot? Here are some tools to get you started:

- Dan Gillmore's (<http://www.dangillmor.com/>) We The Media: Rise of Citizen Journalism (<http://wethemedia.oreilly.com/>) offers an excellent overview of what he calls "grassroots journalism."
- The 11 Layers of Citizen Journalism ([http://www.poynter.org/content/content\\_view.asp?id=83126](http://www.poynter.org/content/content_view.asp?id=83126)) , from the Poynter Institute (<http://www.poynter.org>) is a resource guide that deftly outlines the many ways that citizen journalists can partner with local media outlets.
- I, Reporter (<http://www.ireporter.org/>) is a site dedicated to "Inspiring, guiding, and educating citizen journalists and the news organizations that work with them."

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Spotlight on the New [www.spinproject.org](http://www.spinproject.org): Links and References

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By now you're probably sick and tired of hearing about our new web site, but there's one more section we wanted to share with you: our greatly expanded Links and References section, covering everything from clipping services and producers of radio actualities to polling firms and resources for organizations interested in media activism. You can find them all at:

<http://spinproject.org/article.php?list=type&type=35>.

Of course, a set of links like this is a collaborative effort with out readers, so if there's a site that you find helpful in your communications work, or a topic you feel we should be covering that we're not, why not drop us a line at [info@spinproject.org](mailto:info@spinproject.org)? We'd love to hear from you.

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That's it for this issue of the SPIN Project's e-newsletter. Please feel free to forward any of this information to anyone you think might be interested—we'd greatly appreciate it.

Thanks,

The SPIN Project Staff

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