Co-designing the future of Solutions Journalism

Client – Solutions Journalism Network

Institute of Design
IDN 520 Co-Design + Social Interventions

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Solutions Journalism Network (SJN)

The Solutions Journalism Network is leading a global shift in journalism, focused on what the news misses most often: how people are trying to solve problems and what we can learn from their successes or failures.

Our mission is to transform journalism so that all people have access to news that helps them envision and build a more equitable and sustainable world.
Project Brief

- Identify opportunity spaces for generating revenue through Solutions Journalism.

- Identify a value proposition for business leaders in the news industry that informs their pitch to a collaboration of leaders.

- Identify possible collaborators who can benefit from using solutions content, thereby propagating its use and generating new revenue streams.
What is SoJo?

Solutions journalism is rigorous, evidence-based reporting on responses to social or environmental problems.
Getting to 10% forest cover: Kenya’s road to recovering its lost ecosystem

5 June 2020

David Owino
Kenya Correspondent
Africa News

Today, on World Environment Day, a state agency in Kenya has warned that the country’s ecosystem is under great threat.

The National Environmental Complaints Committee (NECC) has determined that the landslides, erratic rainfall patterns and degraded lands that have caused the loss of life and property in frequent disastrous events across the country have their source in the destruction of trees and forests.
How Vancouver is protecting itself from future flooding — with plants

Green infrastructure promises to keep the worst of flooding and contaminated rivers at bay. But while it has set ambitious targets, Vancouver is falling behind many other big cities. Could Seattle offer an answer?
Issue areas uncovered from Secondary research

- News industry faces loss in advertising revenue; struggling to establish **new business models**
- In wake of being objective, the industry has lost **confidence** with general public.
- Journalism education and the industry promotes a **one way relationship** of journalists with their audience
- Motivations, opportunities, and **theories of change** in the news industry
- Core values of journalistic content haven’t gone beyond reporting problem and holding authorities accountable, even though there are evidences of **people disengaging** with this content.
Issue Areas explored in Primary Research

- News **revenue streams** and models
- Innovations in SoJo **content repurposing**
- **Barriers** to system change in the news industry
- Motivations, opportunities, and **theories of change** in the news industry
- Power and **decision-making** in the news industry
- **Audience** engagement and relationship-building
- New roles and responsibilities for **journalists**
Emerging Themes
Readers deriving value from solutions content to drive impact in professional practice and to maintain their personal passion

“There are environmental groups that have been using our content. A person in Washington State wrote us about a pesticide issue. And they said, we’re using your content at the governmental level to educate our members to then lobby.”

–Naomi Starkman, Civil Eats

“The Vanguard conference is the manifestation of our journalism. Instead of readers going to our website and learning about solutions, we go around the city and we visit solutions. People leave it feeling. They told me that they fall in love with their work again. They feel reinvigorated by going and doing this.”

–Lucas Grindley, Next City
Readers deriving value from solutions content to drive impact in their communities

In the case of Laconia Daily Sun, their community convening was actually smaller but more effective. They convened all the people writing letters to the editor. All of the really ultra conservative people, the more liberal people, they’ve invited. And they had amongst themselves a conversation about where is civil discourse in our community? Do we even have it? Or how can we build that? It was something they called complicating the narrative where they really sought to understand each other and get a little more to the center. **What they did was very small and intimate but very powerful in terms of really having a deeper conversation across ideology** amongst the people who want to express their opinions in the paper.

- Karen Ager, Endowment for Health
So that [our relationship with the audience] has changed dramatically. In the 80s and 90s, when I grew up in journalism, we just honestly didn’t care. We really felt that we were trained and bathed in “Society of Professional Journalist Ethics,” and we would make news decisions for our audiences. We gave them what we thought we needed to give them. …But that dramatically shifted with democratization of on digital platforms. They started talking back to us… So now we really see it as a dialogue. I think we need to teach our journalists and our audience how to make that conversation productive. …And perhaps that’s where we can do some healing for the trust issues that we have developed with our audience because of our old mindset.

- Dr. Amanda Bright, University of Georgia
Participant Name | Quote | Tags (Revenue streams, Repurposed Content, Barriers, Motivators, Decision-making, Audience)
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KL | "What do we really have good evidence for kind of showing that this, this (solutions journalism) is working, and all of all of all of it, it was the the emotion was, was the kind of a key driver that all pretty much all the studies had. You know, solutions journalism makes people feel better like period" | Audience effect
KL | "One was audience's perceived efficacy. And so that's kind of your view on whether or not a problem can be fixed, right? Is there an effective solution to this? And even could I contribute to that, you know, feeling self-efficacy, that I could be a part of the solution, right? Or there is something so it's kind of optimism, but it's more just, it's more rigorous than that" | Audience effect
KL | "We also looked at behavioral intentions and actual behaviors, those were two really big variables that were also included. And so behavioral intention would be, you know, asking them in a survey, how likely are you to, you know, go volunteer at this thing? Or how likely are you to go donate to this cause? And then actual behavior is a little bit harder to measure, which is why it didn't appear as much" | Audience effect
KL | "Karen McIntyre and I just finished a systematic review of 22 different experiments on audience effects, to try and see, you know, what can we definitively say about the effects of solutions journalism on the audience, and the only thing that we can really definitively say right now is that it improves audience emotions, which, you know, is, is, it's a noble thing, but that's not going to, you can't walk into an editor or publishers office and say that, if we commit resources to this, then we're going to make the audience feel better. But they (Always the Netherlands), you could submit story ideas, I ask questions, they really tried to that you, you know, weren't just some agency in it" | Audience effect
KL | "Kind of the big mystery, you know, How do we, how do we get people to have advanced and the way we intend to view some of the events to there. They're hosting this debate connected to that have a vital" | Audience effect

Analysis and Synthesis Process
### Power Dynamics
and decision making in the news industry

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Role of power dynamics in increasing adoption of SoJo
Training Journalists

to write and cover more SoJo stories

Why This Strategy?
There are lots of journalists and SJN was founded by journalists

Desired Outcome
Sets new precedence for and definition of journalism

Barriers
A slow process for change as journalists have the least power in choosing stories to cover in most newsrooms.
Seeking Support from Funders/Philanthropists
to promote and fund SoJo

Why This Strategy?
When ad revenue dried up, philanthropists stepped in

Desired Outcome
Capital and resources to produce SoJo

Barriers
Can behold newsrooms to the demands of the funders and limit editorial independence.

All about relationship building, which is resource intensive- time, human and money.
Targeting Publishers/Editors
by making a case for revenue increase from SoJo

Why This Strategy?
Publishers are the gatekeepers for greenlighting stories and hold power to support SoJo

Desired Outcomes
A new mindset that embraces SoJo at the helm of the news industry

Barriers
Requires changing mental models about traditional outlook on journalism, which is a big task
A new revenue strategy

Deepen audience engagement
SJN’s Strategy for Revenue Growth

Audience engagement + psychological benefits

Increased Revenue
Proposed Strategy for Revenue Growth

Audience engagement + psychological benefits + applying solutions from SoJo in personal and professional lives

Increased Revenue
SJN’s Theory of Change

SJN trains journalists to write SoJo stories

More journalists are aware of, trained in, and believe in SoJo

News industry transforms to embrace and produce more SoJo

More SoJo content exists in the world

Stronger communities
Greater equity
Increase in trust and loyalty
Civic engagement
Depolarization of discourse

A more equitable and sustainable world

SJN makes persuasive case that SoJo can increase revenue
How might we help the **audience** bridge the gap between **awareness and action**?

- SJN trains journalists to write SoJo stories
- More journalists are aware of, trained in, and believe in SoJo
- News industry transforms to embrace and produce more SoJo
- More SoJo content exists in the world

Doing so could create more value for readers and lead to an increase in revenue.

- Stronger communities
- Greater equity
- Increase in trust and loyalty
- Civic engagement
- Depolarization of discourse
- A more equitable and sustainable world
Bridging Awareness to Action

- More structure and scaffolding is needed if readers are going to translate SoJo content into impact in their communities.

- So, how might we enable readers to derive actionable value from SoJo
Co-Design Workshop
With readers

• However, we can’t truly know what would be most valuable to readers without their involvement.
• On December 6, we will be facilitating a co-design workshop in which engaged readers serve as co-designers.

• Anticipated outcomes
  o These co-designers will help us ideate and prototype how audiences might apply and gain value from SoJo articles.
  o We predict that the workshop would result in a set of potential solutions to prototype and explore further.
Suggested Solutions

A partial list of solutions might include:

- **Creating community**
  Creating affinity groups of readers facilitated by journalists
  (e.g. happy hours for climate entrepreneurs to discuss climate solutions and its impact on their business/organisations; book clubs)

- **Educating students**
  Creating curricula to be deployed in classrooms or nontraditional learning settings
  (e.g. youth development programs)

- **Innovating on different platforms**
  Creating audio products (e.g. podcasts featuring journalists going more into stories in more depth)

*Some of these ideas suggest new roles and responsibilities for journalists and news outlets, which is exciting!*
Details of the Workshop

**Participants**
Community leaders and artists advocating various social causes, professional working in city departments and career services

**Duration**
2hrs

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**Step 1**  
Discuss challenges
If you could have some of the brightest and most curious journalistic minds tasks with gathering information and helping solve some of your most pressing challenges, what would you do with that resource?

**Step 2**  
Ideating for solutions
Develop solutions in the group or the challenges discussed

**Step 3**  
Share the solution ideas to the group
Share group solutions to the workshop
Other members of the workshop get to vote and choose if they want to work on a potential idea in the next part of the workshop

**Step 4**  
Prototyping ideas
If you could create your own solution, what would it be?  
(be inspired, mix and match, or come up with something completely new)

**Step 5**  
Prototype presentation
Participants present their prototypes to the members of workshop

**Step 6**  
Quaker fist of five
Participants share if they would like to continue working on their prototypes outside of the workshop
Prototypes from the workshop

“That conceptualising something new that fails is just as important as finding a sustained solution”

Neighbourhood journalism residency to overcome misleading narratives
Prototypes from the workshop

“The ‘con’ of the context really spoke to me as a way to disrupt the false binaries of both sides in journalism”

Content and context library. Removing rose colored glasses to view the world differently
Prototypes from the workshop

Moxy: a program leveraging journalists to bring about policy changes for creating work opportunities for international students
Prototypes from the workshop

*Gesture Hat*: journalists as community builders to help non-profits understand the community and its needs and provide up to date information.
Thank You!

Questions and feedback?