

Module3.1 - Opportunities for using crowdsourcing and social media

Hi, everyone, I'm Lee Zurik. I'm the chief investigative reporter and news anchor at WVUE-TV in New Orleans and also director of investigations for Gray Television and InvestigateTV.

And in this module, you'll learn about investigating on video. Right now, I want to talk about new opportunities for using social media and crowdsourcing to investigate. If you're not 100 percent familiar, crowdsourcing is the practice of obtaining information or input into a task or projects by enlisting the services of a large number of people. When you leave this module, I want you to think about different ways to use your viewers and readers to help you investigate stories and be able to think of creative ways to reach them and engage them.

So, we did a series of stories on health care pricing called Cracking the Code. We wanted to see how much procedures cost at different hospitals or centers. For example, when an MRI cost the different prices at different centers or even a blood test. But when you go into a series like this, you don't have any information around you. So how do you go about finding that information from your viewers, your viewers, your readers? They're going to be the ones that help tell this story. But we had no information, no documents from those readers and viewers. So, what did we do? We went to crowdsourcing and crowdsourcing, turned this into a series of important stories in our community. What we did, embed a short questionnaire in our Web site. You could do it with a Google Form. Ask a few questions, get their contact information and allow people to easily submit the information back to you. We did it and received thousands of responses with compelling stories.

The first thing you need to do is get a copy of your O.B. form, the explanation of benefits that shows how much you paid, how much your insurance company paid, how much all of you were charged. We need to get a copy of that. And what you need to do is go to our Web site and over here you'll see an interactive tool where you can fill out all of the information from that EOB form.

I can't explain it. I wish I wish somebody could explain it to me.

Kim Christina's doctors sent her a Hammons North Oaks Hospital for a blood test.

And about a month later, I received this exorbitant bill.

Christina thought North Oaks made a mistake, but she owes the hospital eight hundred dollars for the 15-minute test.

There's no excuse in the books that could explain that ridiculous amount.

What set her off even more? A coworker using the same insurance, getting the exact same tests, went to LabCorp instead of the hospital and paid six hundred dollars less.

I'm very upset about it.

When we produce any big story, we always set up an email account for people to send in tips. Also, a phone number too. We recently did a story on a post-Katrina fundraising campaign for a football field. One million dollars of money gone and we wanted to hear from donors.

We set up a simple email address field@fox8live.com. Easy to remember, easy to post in different places. The email automatically forwards to the entire reporting team. Remember simple e-mail address that anyone can remember. Easy for them to email it in and up. In an example like this, in this story, we heard from donors all across the country.

Instead, construction stopped more than three years ago.

It's so frustrating and it's sad and it hurts me to my heart that this has happened to my school and my community.

Sometimes we just post on Facebook or Twitter asking for help. In October, the Hard Rock Hotel collapsed during the construction. We wanted to hear from workers on the site. So, we went on our social media accounts and asked them to reach out to us. And they did.

It could have been me. It could have been me.

But you can also use social media to dig up important, interesting information to help your investigative stories. We use Facebook and Twitter to background people in our stories. We look at pictures at their posts to see if that can be used as a part of our reporting. If you're not doing this, you could be missing out.

We did a series of stories in a local coroner or medical examiner who is cashing out unused sick and vacation leave every year. So, he's claiming he never took a sick day, never took a vacation day. So, what do we do? We went to his wife's Facebook page and noticed they were on glamorous trips to the Mediterranean, all over the world. So, he was claiming he was working. He was. Then he cashed out that unused time, even though we saw him traveling all around the world on Facebook. And that Facebook story ended up getting the coroner in trouble. He served time in federal prison. Again, we helped you off Facebook. We used Facebook to help tell this investigative story.

Pictures from paradise. Beautiful. Day stamped courtesy of Facebook. This is dated September 3rd. First class travel to world class destinations. They got upgraded to the Honeymoon Suite, an online album of trips of a lifetime. First Bloody Mary, the Morning Atlanta Bound. Let the fun begin. According to the St. Tammany Parish Corners paychecks, he had no weekday fun outside of Louisiana in 2011 and 2012. That's because the records show he took no vacation. Those two years. Instead, he cashed out his unused vacation and sick time and paid himself sixty-seven thousand dollars. But a quick tour of the Facebook page belonging to Galvan's Wife tells a different story. This is fraud. Labor Day, September 3rd, 2012. Galvan and his wife have a Bloody Mary toast. Their first to the morning, she writes. Let the fun begin.

So, to recap, find creative ways to reach people. Make it simple for them to get you information. Set up Google forums, email addresses, phone numbers and ask them to get in touch. Let them know specifically what you are looking for. Some of this might sound simple, but trust me, it works and it will definitely elevate your investigative journalism.