

Reporting on multiple platforms

For digital journalists, news stories often assume different forms as the coverage evolves.



In the beginning was the word. Then along came photos. Audio. Video. Google. Facebook. Twitter. With so many marvelous technologies at their disposal, news consumers have become a fragmented audience. Some prefer browsing headlines and story chunks on their smartphones. Others would rather hop from link to link on the Web. And a sizable number of traditionalists remain loyal to newsprint, believe it or not.

With so many platforms to choose from, then, what's a reporter to do? When a news story breaks, what's your smartest delivery option? Different news outlets will have different priorities, but it's becoming clear that smart journalists understand how to deliver stories across multiple platforms. And in the example below, we'll show you how that process might typically unfold.

HOW A MODERN STORY EVOLVES: FROM A TWEET TO THE PRINTED PAGE

Pierce Deere is the star quarterback and team captain of the Wildcats — but during practice one afternoon, he's tackled by some teammates. Writhing in pain, he's rushed to the hospital, where doctors discover he's fractured his leg.

Deere's season is over. Fans are distraught. The team is in trouble.

As the hours go by, here's how this story might be delivered across multiple platforms by a reporter working for a newspaper website:

Bugle Football @buglesports
Wildcats QB Pierce Deere injured his leg during practice today. He's been rushed to Mercy Hospital in an ambulance.
20 minutes ago

The SOCIAL MEDIA ALERT

THE TIME: Monday, noon

WHAT'S HAPPENING

You're the football reporter for the Bugle-Beacon. A student phones in a tip: "An ambulance just left the practice field," she says. "They took away one of the players."

You race over to the field. You talk to the trainer. Details are sketchy — for a reliable diagnosis, you'll need to hear from a doctor — but you quickly post that first alert (above) via Twitter. Your tweet gets posted automatically on the Bugle-Beacon's Facebook page, as well.

Before heading to the hospital, you write a follow-up tweet (below). You realize that eventually you'll need to start writing full paragraphs, not just random sentences.

Bugle Football @buglesports
"Deere's leg is definitely broken," says Wildcat trainer Howie Doohan. Players are in shock. More details soon at buglebeacon.com.

THE BENEFITS OF THIS PLATFORM

You can post from almost anywhere. Your bulletins will be read immediately, on both cellphones and computers. You'll reach a loyal and interested audience — Wildcat fans! — who, in turn, will relay your posts to their friends, adding new details and reactions that may assist you when you're ready to write an actual story. And as soon as you post that story online, you can promote it with additional tweets.

THE DOWNSIDE

Tweets are just short bursts — news flashes, not stories. They're often cryptic, lacking in context. And unless items get retweeted, they may reach only a tiny fraction of the public.

buglebeacon.com

HOME NEWS SPORTS BUSINESS ENTERTAINMENT LIFESTYLE OPINION Classifieds

2:00 TWO-MINUTE DRILL A football blog by the Bugle-Beacon sports staff

OCTOBER 14, 2012, 2:00 P.M.

Deere suffers broken leg in practice

BY CHRISTOPHER ALLEN 0 COMMENTS

Wildcats quarterback Pierce Deere has been rushed to St. Vincent Hospital with a broken leg, according to athletic director Rusty Carr.

"I'm told he's resting comfortably," Carr says. "The doctors are still trying to determine whether he'll need surgery to repair the damage."

Deere was injured during a team scrimmage this afternoon. After being tackled by several Wildcat defensive linemen, Deere collapsed to the ground, unable to stand. An ambulance was immediately summoned to take him to the hospital, Carr said.

Coach Orson Bugge was unavailable for comment, but backup quarterback Bigby Eesser is now expected to start in Saturday's game against the Swampfrogs in Lincoln.

The BLOG POST

THE TIME: Monday, 2 p.m.

WHAT'S HAPPENING

Deere's still in the ER. You don't yet have enough solid details to write a full story, but sitting in the waiting room you post what you know on the Bugle-Beacon's football blog.

It's common for news websites to set up blogs like this for columnists and beat reporters. (They're often known as *beat blogs*.) Anytime reporters encounter worthy material — statistics, quotes, follow-up details, random news nuggets — they'll post them instantly, adding photos or videos, as well.

A blog post like this can act as a stopgap while you decide if the topic warrants a more complete story.

THE BENEFITS OF THIS PLATFORM

Like Twitter, most blogging software uses a simple interface that makes it easy for reporters to post material without special technical skill. Adding photos, videos or links isn't too difficult, either. Better yet, your faithful readers always know exactly where to find your posts. And unlike Twitter, it's easy to fix mistakes, update details and, yes, write full paragraphs.

THE DOWNSIDE

On some websites, blogs are tucked in remote corners or buried beneath bigger stories, making them hard for casual readers to find. While they're a terrific clearinghouse for random dispatches, they're not the best format for breaking major news. For that, you'll need to write a full-length story.

DOES A NEWS STORY HAVE TO BE A STORY? OR DOES THAT EVEN MATTER?

For centuries, news stories have truly been stories, stacks of paragraphs cobbled together with a beginning, middle and end. But new media are reshaping news coverage into new forms: the alerts, tweets and blog posts reporters now use to deliver breaking news.

Suppose you're at a disaster scene, texting a steady stream of short dispatches. ▼ Or you're in a courtroom, tweeting minute-by-minute updates on a sensational murder trial.

Is it still necessary to rework those timely Twitter tweets into longer, more traditional "articles" — especially in newsrooms where reporting resources are in short supply?

In a 2011 post on his BuzzMachine blog, Web guru Jeff Jarvis expressed some doubts.

"I am not declaring the article useless or dead," he wrote. "Just optional. Articles can make it easy to catch up on a complex story; they make for easier reading than a string of disjointed facts; they pull together strands of a story and add perspective.

"Articles are wonderful," Jarvis went on, "but they are no longer necessary for every event. They were a necessary form for newspapers and news shows, but not the free-flow, never-ending stream of digital. Sometimes a quick update is sufficient; other times a collection of videos can do the trick."

In the online conversation that followed, some took issue with the idea of the article as "a value-added luxury," as Jarvis called it.

Technology blogger Mathew Ingram argued that live-blogging and live-tweeting often produce an overwhelming stream of data.

"Twitter is just a tool, like the telephone or the video camera — it doesn't replace the need for traditional journalists," Ingram wrote.

"It may make their jobs slightly different, but we still need people to curate and make sense of that stream. If anything, in fact, we need *more* of them, whether we call them journalists or not, as the amount of information we are trying to consume continues to increase."

Bottom line: Delivering the news quickly is every journalist's goal. But explaining what it *means* is every journalist's job.

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HOME NEWS SPORTS BUSINESS ENTERTAINMENT LIFESTYLE OPINION Classifieds Jobs Autos Real Estate Shopping

OCTOBER 14, 2012, 4:00 P.M.

Deere out for season with broken leg

BY CHRISTOPHER ALLEN 0 COMMENTS

Wildcats quarterback Pierce Deere has been sidelined with a broken leg and will sit out the remainder of the season.

Deere was injured during a team scrimmage Tuesday afternoon. After being tackled by several Wildcat defensive linemen, Deere collapsed to the ground, unable to stand. An ambulance took him to Mercy Hospital.

Doctors said that Deere suffered a compound fracture of his fibula. They would not rule out the possibility that he may require surgery in the weeks ahead.

"These things happen," Wildcats coach Orson Bugge said. "But this is the worst thing that could have happened to our team right now. We've just got to suck it up and figure out how to maintain our momentum."

Not only is Deere the captain of the Wildcats, but he's been their leading scorer this season, averaging nearly 23 points per game with 720 yards of total offense.

Wildcat running back Rishay Frazier will

VIDEO "These things happen," says a concerned Coach Bugge.

GALLERY A slideshow of images and video highlights looking back at quarterback Pierce Deere's career.

Serenity now.

Hughes

The WEBSITE STORY

THE TIME: Monday, 4 p.m.

WHAT'S HAPPENING

You've talked to the coach. You've heard from the doctors. But Deere himself is still unavailable. So you head back to the newsroom to write up what you know for a story on the Bugle-Beacon website.

Since this is big news, two multimedia extras will supplement your text. A staff photographer has conducted a short video interview with Coach Bugge. And after foraging through the newsroom photo archives, the photo editor has assembled a slideshow with highlights from Deere's career.

By 4 p.m., your story is finished and posted online. To help direct traffic to this Web page, you send out a new tweet that reads: **Wildcats QB Pierce Deere is out for the season with a broken leg: bitly.com/z6FV5x**. (For more on using social media to promote stories, turn to the next page.)

THE BENEFITS OF THIS PLATFORM

At anytime, from anywhere, you can file stories. Revise them. Fix mistakes. Add photos, videos, graphics, surveys, reader comments and links to related material. Since space is virtually unlimited, you can expand and embellish stories as much as your time and abilities allow. And your stories can be read anywhere on the planet, whether on computer screens or smartphone apps — for free, too (unless a paywall requires users to subscribe for online access).

THE DOWNSIDE

Though noisy, intrusive ads inundate many news sites, they still don't generate enough revenue to pay the bills — which often means smaller staffs and heavier workloads. And producing a multimedia package like this requires more technological expertise than publishing its print equivalent (at right).

Deere's done, and the Wildcats are hurting

A broken leg during practice means the quarterback is out for the duration of the season

By TERRY PINE

It's a dark and rainy day in Lincoln, Neb. The stadium lights are on, but the field is empty. The only sound is the rain falling on the roof of the stadium. The Wildcats are in a huddle, looking at the field. The quarterback is out. The team is in trouble.

44 This is the worst thing that could have happened to our team right now."

HOW THE LEG INJURY OCCURRED

1. Deere was tackled by several defensive linemen during a team scrimmage Tuesday afternoon.

2. Deere suffered a compound fracture of his fibula.

3. Deere was rushed to St. Vincent Hospital with a broken leg.

The PRINT STORY

THE TIME: Tuesday morning

WHAT HAPPENED

You tracked developments all afternoon — and as Monday evening approached, you finally reached Pierce Deere by telephone. You talked about his health, his emotions, the team's future. Deere agreed to meet a staff photographer to shoot photos for the Tuesday edition of the Bugle-Beacon.

Your editor wanted to expand the coverage for the morning paper. He wanted more than just a breaking story about Deere's broken leg; he asked you to analyze the Wildcats' prospects for the rest of their Deere-less season.

To accompany your story, the graphics editor prepared a step-by-step diagram showing how Deere's injury occurred. And a fellow sports reporter compiled a chart listing Deere's statistics and passing records.

THE BENEFITS OF THIS PLATFORM

Newspapers are cheap. Portable. Disposable. Battery-free. (And yes, their ads pay the newsroom's expenses.) The attractive packaging of this story is the result of teamwork, teamwork that takes advantage of the paper's late deadlines. That extra time lets reporters add more perspective to their stories. And while digital delivery is terrific for posting news quickly, the print reading experience is still preferred by vast numbers of subscribers.

THE DOWNSIDE

The ink-on-dead-tree version of this story arrives last in line. In fact, if Deere had broken his leg later in the day, this Monday event might not have made it into Tuesday's paper. The delivery system that newspapers use isn't just slow — it's expensive, too. And for a growing number of young readers, print publications simply aren't a part of their daily media diet.