PUT IT ON THE WEB

An avenue to access and interactivity

KRON-TV PRODUCED A GROUNDBREAKING series in 1998 that provided not only powerful insights into the race issue but also served as an effective model for television reporting on race. And any newsroom can use it as a model because it is easily available for viewing.

Go to *www.sfgate.com* and you can find the whole thing — nearly an hour of programming divided into five segments — preserved indefinitely and available to anyone with a computer connected to the Web.

This availability and longevity is the beauty of putting your project on the Web. It becomes accessible anytime, anywhere, to anyone with a computer.

As former KRON News Director Dan Rosenheim noted, "Most pieces are on their way to Jupiter after they've been on the air and, if you were out when it was on, it's gone. But these live on the Web."

If archiving were the only use of the Web, it would be a tremendous asset but some news organizations found creative ways to add value to their projects using Web components that went beyond the possibilities of traditional media.

ADDING VALUE

News organizations took advantage of the Web's unlimited space and interactivity in a number of ways:

• **Links:** In the spring of 2000, the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* ran "The New Face of Minnesota," a seven-part series on how an influx of new immigrants is changing the state. Part of the goal, said Special Projects Editor Kate Parry, was to remind native Minnesotans that, somewhere along the line, someone in

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their family history was a new immigrant. That goal gave the Web site a brainstorm. One of the most popular uses of the Web is to research family origins. The paper's webmaster built in links from the series to various genealogical Web sites so readers could readily make the connection and have another reason to visit the page.

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"About Race" is archived in its entirety at www.sfgate.com.

• **Chat rooms:** For better or worse, readers, viewers and listeners always have much to say or ask about race. Chat rooms and bulletin boards give people a way to communicate the intense opinions that may bubble up in response to a project or story and perhaps even initiate a dialogue with others that can lead to a better understanding. The *San Francisco Chronicle* hosted a chat room while KRON's "About Race" series ran in 1998 and the caliber of the comments was stunning, bringing new depth to the community's conversation on the topic.

"One of the real knotty centers of the discussion on race," wrote one user, "is what happens with well-meaning people who don't want to have racist inclinations but who, in their heart of hearts, really do." The *Chronicle*

was prepared to edit the site if it degenerated into ranting but it never did, perhaps, editors speculate, because of who was drawn to it.

Editors at some other papers were a bit more cautious. Doug Haddix, at *The Columbus Dispatch*, said he wanted to set up a monitored chat room but had to abandon the idea. "We don't really have the staff to do that and, given the topic, it really would require policing or it could get out of hand," he said. Instead, the Web site invited comments through e-mail and posted them, allowing editors to weed out those with offensive language.

The Journal Times of Racine, Wisconsin, took a similar approach. "In hindsight it was probably a good idea," said City Editor Gary Metro. "Some of the anonymous things that got sent by e-mail were hurtful in nature and we wouldn't have wanted them on the Web site." The site also ran poll questions, generating hundreds of responses, and posted the results.

• **Q&A's:** *The Detroit News* made good use of the Web's ability to connect ordinary people

asking questions with experts providing answers. In February 1999, the paper ran a report on the gap in mortgage lending, showing middle-class blacks twice as likely to be turned down for a home loan as whites of the same income level. When the story ran in the paper, *The News* assembled a panel of five experts and invited readers to address questions to them through the Web site. The experts then posted their answers, providing advice that was easily accessible to all on the most practical consumer concerns.

• **Audio and video buttons:** These devices not only make archiving possible for radio and television stories but also add a whole new dimension to newspaper sites. Audio and video lift a story off the page. Probably the best example is the video link on *The New York Times'* site that accompanies the text of reporter Ginger Thompson's story about historical tours at a former plantation. More than simply a sound bite, it is a mini-documentary about Thompson's story, featuring the key players from her article taking users on a tour of the plantation.

For many papers, though, such elements are still just a dream. Reporter Dustin Block of *The Journal Times* in Racine said his Web site decided against including audio and video because it takes a major investment and, due to variations in equipment and software, not enough users would benefit from it. "We actually thought it would frustrate people (with old browsers and slow modems)," said Block, though he adds that audio and video eventually will probably become standard features on most sites.

• **Additional information:** Another great advantage of the Web is its unlimited news hole. Many projects use that capacity to provide additional information for the intensely interested that would be impossible to include in a newspaper or on the air. *The Journal Times* and *The Columbus Dispatch*, for example, posted far more reader feedback on their Web sites than they could have printed even on expanded letters-to-the-editor pages. *The New York Times* posted pictures online that it didn't have room for on its pages and even restored to stories a few graphs that had been cut for space.

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— *A CHRONICLE WEB SITE USER*

This area is still new. The older race projects were not even saved and most of the newer ones settled for archiving their work without taking advantage of other capabilities of the Web. However, as new ways of presenting information on the Web grow, this may become the most important feature of projects on race. It's an exciting challenge for future journalists.

THE PROJECTS

THE NEW YORK TIMES: Setting the Gold Standard

As any reporter knows, there is the story and then there is the story behind the story. The hidden story is the one you tell over drinks for laughs or sympathy but it seldom finds a wider audience than friends and colleagues.

The *New York Times* reporters and photographers who worked on "How Race is Lived in America," however, found a larger platform for those insiders' tales. These stories were among the many premiums offered on the Web version of the series.

The "Reporter's Journal" and "Photographer's Journal" placed on the Web with each installment were great reading. In fact, for those who seek even deeper understanding, *The Times*' Web site is a browser's treasure house: video illustrations, audio and transcripts of panel discussions, forums, links to other Internet resources, digitized stories from the newspaper's archives, questionnaires and selected responses, additional pictures and interactive features that provide a wealth of additional information.

The Times' site is the gold standard for using the Web to enrich a project.

"It's great when something like this comes along that you can throw yourself into and also have the benefit of working with the folks at the paper," said Meredith Artley, associate editor at NYT on the Web. "This was a very, very collaborative effort."

The key, said Artley, was joining the project early on. The Web site at www.nytimes.com/race began working on its content eight months before the first article appeared in the paper.

Artley said she worked on the series nearly full time and 10 other people at the site spent significant amounts of time producing its array of features. Their work was recognized in December 2000 by the first annual Online Journalism Awards from Columbia University.

"It was a powerful series enhanced by dis-

Visitors to www.nytimes.com/race can sit in on a panel discussion, tour the plantation featured in the series or fill out a questionnaire.

play and packaging," the judges said. "The site took a provocative topic and provided a forum where readers could continue a compelling and heartfelt dialogue."

Indeed, the opportunities for users to join a conversation on the topic were myriad:

- Each installment had its own forum focused on the article's topic.
- An area for a more general discussion was built into part of the site known as "buzz."
- A section asked readers to provide more thoughtful answers to specific questions.

Editors culled through the responses and posted ones they found particularly insightful.

"My childhood did not prepare me to mix with people of other races; in fact, it hurt me," wrote Karen Turner, 33, of Newmarket, New Hampshire. *"I thought my innards would explode just interacting on a human level with black people ... I was convinced that the person I was interacting with could see right through me to my ugly, hypocritical core."*

Artley said the Web site received literally thousands of responses and they came from all over the world.

ADDING INTERACTIVE FEATURES

Many other interactive features provided new ways of looking at the topic. Some were tailored to a particular installment of the series so that each part had its own distinctive package on the Web.

Included with the final installment, a grab bag of images and information from the magazine, was a feature called "Consumed by Race," which explained the difference in buying habits between black families and white families.

In this feature, users can choose to look at a photo of an archetypal living room or kitchen, and as they move their mouse around the picture, a box shows what product the mouse is pointing to and which brand of that product is most popular among whites and which brand is most popular among blacks. Little overlap exists.

Creating this feature was an extremely time-consuming process, Artley said, because it required dissecting each photo and charting where each product within the picture was placed on the x and y axis. But she said it enabled the Web site to provide a wealth of information in a fun, easy-to-access way.

Artley is perhaps most proud of the video that accompanies some of the articles. For the installment "Reaping What Was Sown on the Old Plantation," about how a historic plantation in Natchitoches, Louisiana, handles the issue of slavery, the Web site sent a crew to record the highest quality audio and video possible. Users can take a tour of the plantation led by the main characters from the newspaper story.

"This was really quite groundbreaking, one of the best multimedia projects we've done," said

The New York Times on the Web

Meredith Artley worked closely with print reporters and editors to produce an award-winning Internet component for "How Race is Lived in America."

Artley. "It really brought the story to life on the Web site. It took users beyond reading the text."

Another feature that attracted a lot of interest was the link to newspaper articles from *The Times*' archives that normally would not have been available online, or at least not without a fee.

The archives link connects users to actual front pages of *The Times*, going back to the 1857 Dred Scott decision. *"Negroes, whether slaves or free, that is, men of the African race, are not citizens of the United States by the Constitution,"* the article quotes the Supreme Court as ruling.

The archive page also includes the February 1, 1865, *Times* report on the Abolition of Slavery, an account of a 1906 lynching in Ohio and of 1919 race riots in Chicago. There is a 1928 trend story headlined, "Negro Migration Causing Social Revolution in South," and the story of Jackie Robinson joining the Brooklyn Dodgers.

A chilling front page shows the ruined Birmingham black church where a bombing by white supremacists killed four little girls. The bombers were convicted of the crime in April 2001. The original article is from *The Times* of September 15, 1963.

The archives offer articles through the April 13, 2000, report on the South Carolina Senate's decision to remove the Confederate flag from the state house.

Bill Mitchell, online editor at the Poynter Institute who regularly scrutinizes newspaper Web sites, found the archive link one of the highlights of "How Race is Lived" online. "People do care about tracking previously published articles," he said, noting that access to archives — for which newspapers including *The Times* normally charge a fee — are one of the few things that actually make money for newspaper Web sites.

Mitchell adds, though, that he was impressed with the remarkable variety of features the Web site offered on this project. "It was more than simply e-publishing what was in print," he said. "They developed really imaginative stuff that enables people who really care to drill down deeply."

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>
> —*MEREDITH ARTLEY, NYT ON THE WEB*

EDUCATING VIA THE WEB

The Times' Learning Network, which promotes using the newspaper in schools, also provided several links. It had a questionnaire designed specifically for students that drew different kinds of answers than the more general questionnaire.

For instance, to the question, *"Have you had a painful or uncomfortable experience having to do with race?"* a 12th grader named Adam responded, *"Walking with a black friend and being stopped by police. I usually maintain collegial relations with the NYPD. Something was different."*

The Learning Network also offered lesson plans using each installment. One example was an activity that went with reporter Charlie LeDuff's story about racial groupings at a meatpacking plant. Students would draw different colored straws and be assigned a job based on the color they drew. It showed how arbitrary a division of labor based on race is.

All of these features are still available online and, according to Artley, will be forever. "We don't plan to take it down ever," she said. "The challenge, being a breaking-news site, is to continue to link heavily to the race area. As the series gets older, we'll promote it less and less but we'll always have it available because these articles are relevant always."

Chapter Tips: *Using the Web*

- Be creative; don't just use the Web to "e-publish" what has already been reported.
- Use links to other sites about the topic.
- Chat rooms, bulletin boards and virtual forums all can get the community involved and yield some new in-depth insights.
- Use your unlimited virtual news hole for copy that didn't get out to the public, photos that were great but left out for space or even separate stories that didn't fit into a series.
- Remember, when yesterday's news is gone, your series can be on the Web indefinitely.