Internet as a tool for journalist

Help for journalists

There are specialist sites for different types of reporting, like business or environment, or for specific

skills like copy editing/sub-editing. For information on wider journalism and media issues, try the

International Federation of Journalists, including authors' rights, gender issues, and trade union matters,

the International Freedom of Expression Exchange, and Reporters Without Borders.

Reference tools

Wikipedia, the volunteer encyclopedia

Compilations of reference facilities abound on the web.Infoplease have a useful selection, including

almanacs for current information. One of the innovations of the web is the great co-operative

encyclopedia, Wikipedia, which now attracts 50m+ hits a day. Written by volunteers, it spans over

700,000 articles in English, with smaller quantities in dozens of other languages. Individuals can edit the

contributions, but their changes are monitored by teams of other volunteers, so there are controls over

what appears. A real plus is that entries can be updated in a matter of hours when something significant

changes. Traditional encyclopedias have migrated online and can be useful for general knowledge

queries, especially in fields where current events are not likely to outdate entries. Free offerings tend to be

smaller, or older, versions: Encyclopedia Britannica offers only limited results unless you buy a

subscription. Other possibilities include the Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, with over 50,000 entries,

and Microsoft's Encarta, through the free pass offered in MSN Search (their paid service covers some

60,000 articles). Yearbooks or almanacs may lack changes that have occurred since publication; it's

another area where the net can keep ahead. The online version of the CIA World Fact book is updated

through the year. It offers a welter of facts and figures on the countries of the world, and is also

downloadable.

Experts:

ProfNet provides links to thousands of news and information officers in the Americas, Europe and Africa,

and offers a searchable database of 16,000+ experts (mostly in the US, UK and Canada, it appears). They

operate for email queries on weekdays from 9am to 11pm, Greenwich Mean Time. Journalism Net has a

good round-up of sources for experts from various countries and different disciplines.

Figures Statistics:

The UN is a central starting point. Go to the Statistics division – as well as social indicators for the

member countries, there are links to figures for trade, environment and much else. Go to the different

world bodies, like the World Bank or the Food and Agriculture Organization, for detail on specialist

areas. Via the home pages of the UN missions for each state, there are links to government information

for each country.

The UN's Info Nation is a really straightforward site for creating charts of comparative data from groups

of countries. You can produce bar charts on anything from crime to tourism. As a way of providing an

instant customized illustration, for articles on subjects ranging from TV ownership to refugees, it's worth

trying. CALCULATIONS: For everyday computations, use a search engine like Google. MONEY: Plenty

of search engines and portals will convert foreign currencies, but watch when little-traded currencies were

last updated.

Words Dictionaries:

There seem to be shelves of dictionary sites. But given that Google provides word definitions, why bother

going elsewhere? AskOxford.com, based on the Compact Oxford English Dictionary, was probably the

best

Style Guides:

There are no absolutes when it comes to writing styles: it is up to an organization to decide what is best

for its readers or listeners, in terms of grammar, spelling, names, titles etc. But if no-one is laying down

the rules for you, consult a manual from an established media concern. AP style is commonly used, not

only in the USA, but the AP Stylebook must be paid for – likewise the Reuters guide. There are several

UK guides offered freely over the web (downloadable in some cases):

●The BBC

●The Times

●The Economist

●The Guardian

Quotations:

The net should be a good place to find quotations – they can be easily indexed, and it is possible to put a

phrase or sentence into a search such as Google to find out who said it. There are plenty of sites for

quotations, but they are none too comprehensive, and are weak on recent quotes.

Translators:

Machine translation is one of the boons of the net. While it used to be good enough to give only the gist

of the original text, it is increasingly reliable. Nevertheless, human intervention is still required to ensure

accuracy and make perfect sense. Typically, this translated passage can just about be understood, but

requires editing to be used in a news report Both Google and Yahoo! offer a 'translate this page' link

alongside search results in foreign languages. Google has improved its facility by a huge throughput of

translated documents from the UN and elsewhere – educating its own system. It has a 'language tools'

button on its search page, offering to translate, between varieties of languages, either a text (which you

paste in) or a web page (write the URL). It provides 18 pairs of languages – a 'pair' would be English into

Chinese, or German to French.

Places Time:

Knowing the time in other countries can be important if you are trying to contact people, or check when

events happen. Time Zone Converter starts automatically with the time where you are, and you select the

place where you need the current time. An alternative approach from World Time Server lets you set a

time in one place, and then check the time somewhere else.

Maps:

To find a local map, writing the place name and 'map' into a search engine may produce better results than

using the leading map sites, which lack detailed coverage for many countries. Google Earth, with

downloadable software, offers the ability to swoop down from space, looking at ever more detailed

satellite images, and then searching for streets or post codes on the results