



<http://instagram.com/p/RYtQghtKAu/> credit: @andjelicaaa

SOCIAL NEWS GATHERING: A COLLECTION OF STORYFUL BLOG POSTS

EDITED BY CLAIRE WARDLE

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INTRODUCTION

Storyful is the world's first social media news agency. The company was started in 2010 by Mark Little, a former foreign correspondent for the Irish national broadcaster, RTÉ. For the past three years Storyful has been working with the world's biggest news organisations, discovering and verifying content from across the social web.

Founded in Dublin with just three staff, Storyful's raison d'être was to devise a way to manage the huge amounts of content being shared on new social platforms by creating effective processes and technology to help filter "news from noise".

Storyful's team is now thirty strong, two-thirds of whom are journalists, adept at scanning and interrogating content on YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, Reddit, Instagram, Reddit, Weibo and many other platforms around the clock.

In the spirit of open collaboration, we decided to start sharing some tricks of the trade on our blog (blog.storyful.com). Mark Little kicked it all off with his post on the 'Human Algorithm', the nexus between human and technological newsgathering. It's included here, along with the best of our material from 2012. Some chapters discuss the future of journalism, some others the ethical dilemmas within it, but most of them are focused on the how-to of the new journalism we have pioneered - social discovery and verification. We have built tools, work-arounds and shortcuts to enable us to keep on top of all of the social streams, but more importantly to work out whether the content we're finding is trustworthy.

In the following chapters, you'll find in-depth guides to verifying content online, how to build and manage Twitter lists, how to use Tweetdeck effectively as a journalist, how to spot fake photographs, and how to geo-locate videos on maps. We decided it was worth collecting our blog posts in a single place so it could be a one-stop resource.

This book is aimed at journalists who need to learn the skills of social newsgathering, as well as students and journalism educators who want to be at the cutting edge of on-line discovery and verification.

Claire Wardle
January 2013



https://www.facebook.com/note.php?note_id=469716398919

FIRST PUBLISHED IN MAY 2011

1

THE HUMAN ALGORITHM

BY MARK LITTLE

When I became a reporter, almost 20 years ago, my job was to dig up scarce, precious facts and deliver them to a passive audience. Today, scarcity has been replaced by an unimaginable surplus and that audience is actively building its own newsroom.

Journalists the world over are struggling to cope with a social and mobile tsunami of 'user generated content', to use an increasingly inadequate phrase. Twitter and YouTube will overwhelm news organisations who can't master their potential. A common

mistake for those seeking to cope with this profound disruption is to confuse technology with innovation. Algorithms, apps and search tools help make data useful but they can't replace the value judgements at the core of journalism.

Genuine innovation requires a fundamental shift in how journalists think about their role in a changed world. To begin with, they need to get used to being 'curators'; sorting news from the noise on the social web using smart new tools and good old fashioned reporting skills.

I find it helps to think of curation as three central questions:

- Discovery: How do we find valuable social media content?
- Verification: How do we make sure we can trust it?
- Delivery: How do we turn that content into stories for a changed audience?

Without a doubt, verification is the greatest challenge. It's also the greatest opportunity for 'social journalists' willing to leave the confines of traditional news organisations and perhaps even create their own.

With some like-minded souls, I founded Storyful in early 2010. We wanted to be the first news agency purpose-built for the social media age. Our objective was to help others discover, verify and deliver the most valuable content on the social web. By late January 2011, we had formed a curation partnership with YouTube, finding and validating the defining videos from the escalating protests in Egypt and beyond for its CitizenTube channel.

I had always been confident about the assumptions which drove Storyful but it wasn't until the early bloom of the 'Arab Spring' that I could see the practical impact of our work. I can even remember a light-bulb moment, when one of our curators described to me the process that led us to post the following video on January 28th:

This video records the ebb and flow of a pitched battle between riot police and protesters on the Qasr al Nile bridge in Cairo. The video was shot by Mohamed Ibrahim el Masry, who was staying at a hotel overlooking the bridge.

Our curators discovered the video on Facebook and quickly contacted Mohamed to confirm he was the original creator of this remarkable footage.

Egypt Cairo uprising protest video (28th January 2011) filmed by Mohamed Ibrahim Elmasry on Kasr al Nile bridge



<http://youtu.be/t4OSMFYc9Mc>

The team used Google earth to check the location of the bridge and Mohamed's vantage point. Using social media channels Flickr and Panoramio, Storyful compared Mohamed's video with other user generated content shot on ground level.

Finally, the curator asked Mohamed for his permission to upload the video to YouTube and pass it on news organisations. Mohamed sought only a credit in exchange for the free use of his video.

In the months since our encounter with Mohamed, our relationship with CitizenTube and US news organisations has evolved, and so have the techniques highlighted on that ‘light-bulb’ day.

Each circumstance, each story, is very different. But there are certain critical steps in the verification process for user generated video:

- Review of the uploader’s history and location to see whether he/she has shared useful and credible content in the past, or if he/she is a “scraper”, passing other people’s content off as their own (location is a big clue: don’t trust uploaders in Japan to post video from Syria).
- Use of Google street view/maps/satellite imagery to help verify the locations in a video.
- Consultation of other news sources or validated user content to confirm events in a video happened as they were described.
- Examination of key features in a video such as weather and background landscape to see if they match known facts on the ground.
- Translation of every word that comes with a video for additional context.
- Monitoring social media traffic to see who is sharing the content and what questions are being asked about it.
- Develop and maintain relationships with people within the community around the story.

There is no secret sauce in this process. It is old fashioned reporting powered by advanced social web tools with a little dash of new-fangled data journalism.

Of course, I have left out the most important part of this process: what we at Storyful have come to know as the ‘Human Algorithm’.

I have absolute faith in our curators and our Storyful system in the US and Ireland, but there is simply no way they can solve the puzzle on their own. The only way a curator can ultimately sort news from noise is to join the social media conversation which emerges from news events. Not just listen, but engage directly, openly and honestly with the most authentic voices.

Every news event in the age of social media creates more than a conversation, it creates a community. When news breaks, a self-selecting network gathers to talk about

the story. Some are witnesses – the creators of original content – others are amplifiers – passing that content on to a wider audience. And in every group are the filters, the people who everyone else looks to for judgement.

At the outset of the Egyptian revolution, the community began with a relatively small group of activists like Wael Ghonim and citizen journalists like @Sandmonkey. The community evolved to include supporters like Mona Eltahawy in New York and committed observers like Andy Carvin in Washington and Sultan al Qaseemi in Dubai. Eventually, that community would include foreign correspondents who flocked to Tahrir Square.

Twitter is the door to that community. Twitter lists help map out its membership and channel its ‘real-time’ reporting, debating and verifying. Most news organisations will look on as passive observers. But that is not enough. The only way to unlock the power of the Human Algorithm is to be a part of it.

The value of the Human Algorithm first became clear to us when catastrophic floods struck Queensland, Australia. One day, we picked up a remarkable image of a crocodile in a flooded car park. It was too good to be true so we decided to drop the image into the social media conversation around the floods. Suddenly, we were part of a furious debate about crocodiles in Australia. Not only did it prove our great image really was too good to be true, it also taught me a lot about reptile infestation.

We had more profound experiences of this Human Algorithm at work in recent weeks, most notably with reports of mass graves being discovered outside the besieged Syrian town of Deraa. Interaction with Facebook groups led us to Twitter conversations and YouTube videos. E-mail conversations with US-based academics has led us to key translations and satellite imagery.

This is the ‘Human Algorithm’ at work; the wisdom of a social media community harnessed through open, honest and informed engagement.

One of the greatest advantage of the human algorithm is that it doesn’t stop working at deadline. In the old days, journalists only worried if a story was true at the time it was published. Real-time news communities continue to refine and fact-check and verify, and as the community grows its ability to refine the story grows exponentially.

All of this is tricky for mainstream media organisations, which were designed around deadlines, detachment and clear divisions between reporter and audience. Essentially, reporters have been trained to be a breed apart. Getting rid of that assumption is the first step towards genuine innovation.

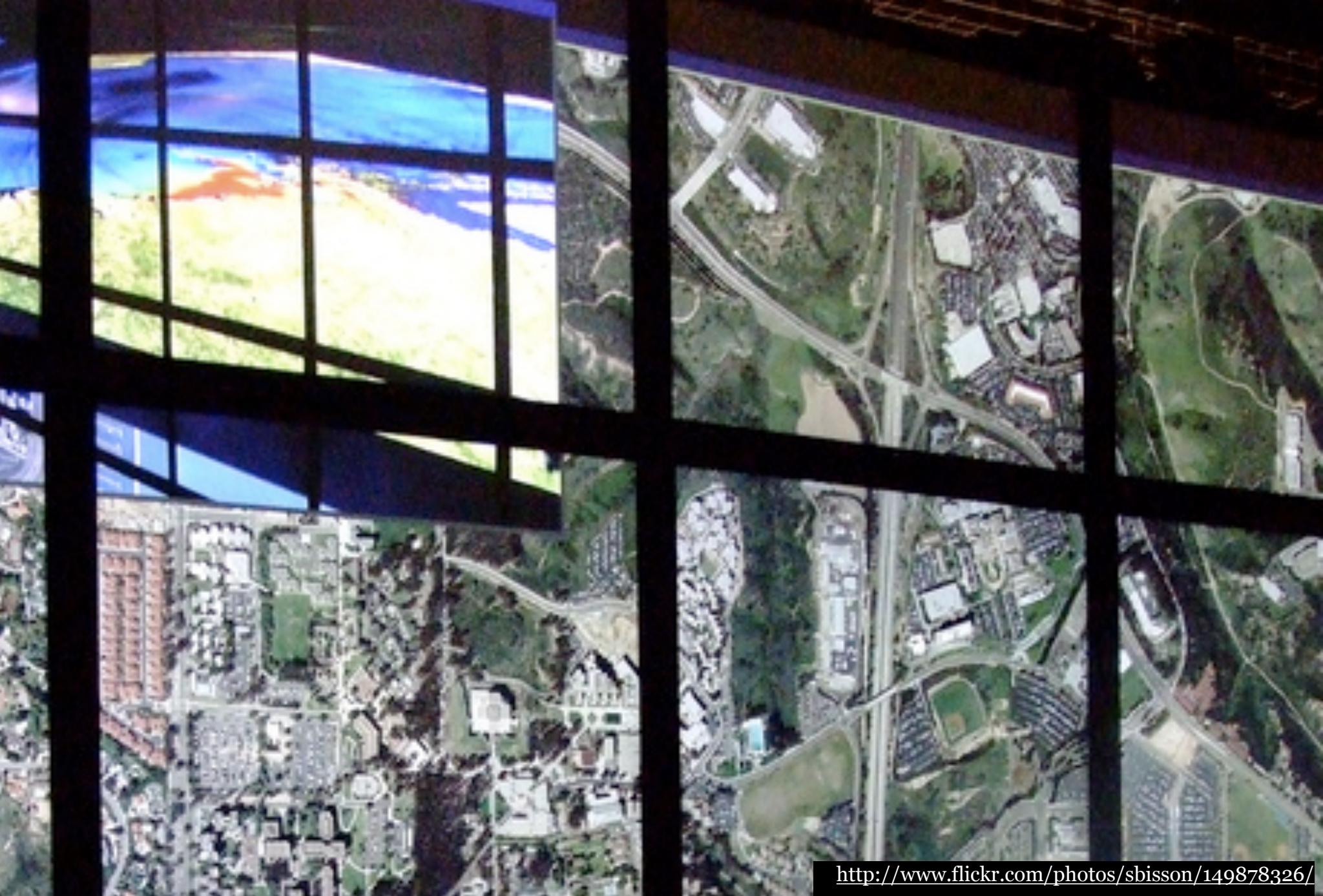
Storyful was designed to live within social media communities, not observe from a safe distance. With new practices come new guidelines and we have worked hard to establish guiding principles for engagement.

Storyful judges the credibility of a source on social media by their behaviour and status within the community. Our curators use this insight to build and refine databases of social web sources, organised around key issues and locations. In its simplest form, this involves Twitter lists tracking each breaking news story.

There are no hard and fast rules used in choosing these sources, but the general checklist include:

- Proximity to the event.
- Established journalistic, academic, or official credentials.
- Past behaviour on the social web.
- Status within established activist/political/social media group.

Technology gave us the tools to map these news communities and engage directly with their members. But it is the oldest journalistic skill of all which gives this process meaning and that is engagement. It is the skill most easily overlooked in the rush towards a brand new journalism: the supreme importance of interaction between two human beings.



<http://www.flickr.com/photos/sbisson/149878326/>

FIRST PUBLISHED IN JULY 2012

2

NEWSROOMS AS INTELLIGENCE AGENCIES

BY GAVIN SHERIDAN

There's a scene in the movie 'The Sum of All Fears' where CIA analyst Jack Ryan is desperately trying to get to a computer terminal to connect to the Russian president. Trying to convince someone, he says:

My orders are to get the right information to the people who make the decisions. I just need to send some information.

Is journalism that dissimilar? At its core, isn't journalism about getting the right information, with context, to the people who make the decisions – i.e. citizens?

There are some similarities between the functions of newsrooms and those of intelligence agencies. Both need to know what's going on (at levels from local to global), both need information they can act on, both employ 'analysts' to parse information. Of course, there's a difference in their stated goals: imparting contextualised information to the broader public or holding government to account are certainly not what intelligence agencies are about.

But do the similarities stop there? Having relatively up-to-date satellite photographs of most of the world is something intelligence agencies have had for decades, but thanks to services like Google Maps, now everyone has access to such images. The result is that one of the skillsets of journalists in 2012 is that of a satellite image analyst.

Indeed, many of the current trends in journalism talk about data journalism, 'big' data and verification – stuff intelligence agencies have been doing for a generation. The difference, these days, is that many of the tools and technologies which, for so long, were so big and expensive that only intelligence agencies could have access to them are now available for little or no cost to newsrooms. And newsrooms are only just starting to exploit these technologies.

Will we look back at these early days with nostalgia, recalling when one 17" computer screen and a basic desktop computer with a browser and Outlook was enough, just as older journalists now are nostalgic for the days of typewriters and hot metal?

How many screens will journalists need in five years' time? Storyful curators use high end desktop machines with either two or three 24'/27' screens – will this become the default? How much data will newsrooms be processing in five years' time? How long before newsrooms look trading desks filled with multi-screen Bloomberg terminals? How much data mining will newsrooms be doing? How sophisticated will their monitoring be? How big and fast will their servers be?

News gathering is entering a digital age. The volume of information becoming available is exploding. There are also fewer journalists to handle the ever-increasing load.

In a world with fewer journalists and more information, what will happen?

One way I see to describe journalism is as “information management” (I can feel the collective eyes of journalists rolling at that description, but bear with me, **I’m not the first to hint at it**).



Taking the intelligence agency analogy a step further, traditional journalism could be narrowed down to a three-stage process, though I know this is not an all-encompassing definition.

- 1) Information gathering/procurement
- 2) Information management/analysis
- 3) Information dissemination/distribution.

Or to put it another way: stuff happens; journalists gather, organise, parse and analyse the stuff; and then journalists tell the broader public about it.

This applies to everything from reporting on weather events to longterm investigations into corruption. In both cases information is gathered and procured, be it from whistleblowers, sources or FOIA, spreadsheets, databases, tweets, eyewitnesses or local law enforcement. It is then parsed or analysed before being disseminated.

So what is wrong with newsrooms? Their task is to manage a flow of information, yet they can seem quite inefficient at the task. Apart from the fact that many journalists tend to jealously guard their sources rather than share them across the newsroom, there are questions to be asked about how good journalists are at managing the data generated from the job they do. Do we destroy too much information after we write

our piece or broadcast our interview? To what extent do we store and analyse the information we already have?

Print newsrooms have a habit of throwing out the raw material of journalism because the product – the article – is considered the ‘finished’ version. But when have newsrooms considered datamining primary source material collected as a standard process, which could produce more leads, more valuable intel and as a result, more stories? If you were designing a newsroom from the ground up, would it have at its core a database rather than a printing press?

In the newsroom context the main tool nowadays is the browser and, as **previously indicated**, many journalists are not very good at using those. From a systems and technology point of view, newsrooms are often sorely lacking. Software is often devoted solely to output – Content Management Systems too often entirely focused on production and not managing. What software helps journalists do their job? What tools – tools specifically designed for journalists – might help them gather and analyse news? We haven’t seen that many since computers started taking over newsrooms.

The collective intelligence of the newsroom is something we rarely exploit efficiently – the closest we often get is editorial meetings. Newsrooms can often under-resource continual training, and newsrooms almost never build tools for themselves to help them be better at what they do. Shouldn’t newsrooms be aiming to equip their staff with the best ways to manage information, especially given the exponential growth of information we are experiencing?

Much of the debate around the news industry, and indeed its future, centers on website traffic figures, paywalls, declining ad revenues, declining interest in long-form journalism, or general fear about the future of the industry and how it might sustain itself. Of course these questions are crucially important, but this debate could be said to be mostly contained in the third stage – disseminating the value-added stuff to the public.

A smaller portion of the debate is focused on what journalism is, what the process is, what purpose it serves and what value it brings, perhaps because we often assume that the journalism that came before was the best kind of journalism there could have been. But was it? **Could we be better?** With the convergence of more and more information – especially the digital kind – and exceptionally powerful tools to parse and

analyse that digital information, we could imagine that the golden age of journalism is in fact ahead of us, not behind us.



FIRST PUBLISHED IN OCTOBER 2012

3

MAKING CONTACT: GETTING CLOSER TO THE STORY VIA THE SOCIAL WEB

BY JOE GALVIN

There's been a lot of talk lately of content – journalists need it, stories require it, everybody's after it and all hail it as king. But beyond content – the meat of a news story, the stuff that fills up a blank page, a static screen or radio silence – news organizations often look for more: they need the primary sources, the people close to a story, the ones creating the content, to provide context and the human voice that makes us pay attention. One of the most harrowing videos to come across our news desk recently emerged from Port Harcourt in Nigeria. The graphic and disturbing video de-

picted the brutal execution of four young students from the University of Port Harcourt



– quickly dubbed the Uniport 4. Rumours swirled around about the four young men, including reports that they were **criminals who were executed for theft**. The story generated international interest but news organizations needed context to get to the truth about Uniport 4, and they needed a human voice to bring that home. They needed a contact.

While we monitored the story of the Uniport 4 on Twitter, we noticed several mentions of a local radio interview in which friends of the four were inter-

viewed. The popular Nigerian message board **Nairaland.com** tweeted the following:



A direct link to a download of the radio interview, which was conducted by the local radio station **Radio Port Harcourt**, was available on Nairaland. One of the voices you can hear there is that of Michael Lestat. Lestat, friends with two of the four students, reacted angrily to and rejected completely claims that they were criminals.

In the accompanying Nairaland discussion regarding the interview, one poster said: “I actually shed silent tears at the tail end of the interview...when the guy said that ‘it could have been me. No difference. I’m an artist like them’.” You can listen to the full interview, courtesy of Radio Port Harcourt. Click on the audio symbol in the sidebar.

We contacted Radio Port Harcourt, who responded with contact details for Lestat. Within minutes, one of Storyful’s news clients was speaking to him, and getting



**91.7 Radio Port
Harcourt interview
with friends of
slain students of
Uniport.**

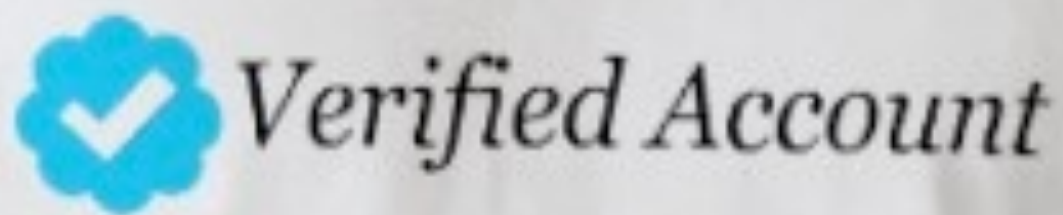
a friend's perspective on what happened. And this all-important voice in a significant story came through monitoring social media, getting the search terms right and making contact.

Journalists who are increasingly looking to social media for context on stories have come in for some criticism by those who worry that it cuts out the messy sprawl and depth of voice-to-voice human interaction. But behind every social media account is a real person, a source, who can be connected with a news organisation or journalist for that human element.

Far from removing those voices from the story, it's a way of tracking them down in a manner that was never possible before so that they can be included.

Stories like that of the Uniport 4 are why we've spent time building a database of contacts, and why finding verified contacts for any key story has become as important as finding the content itself. Every journalist is trained to look for the five Ws on any story, but equally important to our news team are the three Cs; content, context and contacts.

Content such as videos or photographs provide us with a window through which we can look at the wider world. But sometimes to truly understand an event, particularly an event as confusing as tragic as murders of the Uniport 4, you need a person like Michael Lestat to share his story.



<http://meyermusik.de/includes/verified-twitter-account>

FIRST PUBLISHED IN APRIL 2012

4

HOW TO VALIDATE ONLINE CONTENT

BY MALACHY BROWNE

British writer Lynn Barber has scalped some formidable egos in her time. Laced with acerbic scrutiny, her interviews have become something of renown in the British Isles. Her secret? Approach. She confessed in a 2010 interview to beginning interviews by adopting a natural dislike of her subject: the conversation is their opportunity to win her over.

At Storyful, we interrogate content shared on the social web in a style not dissimilar Barber's grilling of dignitaries of media and politics. We adopt a natural skepticism to every item of content we discover. Verification is a cornerstone of our work and it has to be. Information and content often spreads across social media in 'Chinese whispers' fashion. Videos and images are spliced, diced and re-posted. Context and details change, agendas compete. Falsehoods and fabrications are deliberately issued.

Within an hour of the Pacific tsunami alert being issued on April 11, 2012, Twitter and YouTube abounded with videos purporting to show monster waves striking the coast of Sumatra and Aceh in Indonesia. However, these were versions of the devastating 2004 tsunami and other dramatic videos, reissued with the 2012 date. In December 2011, when a police officer was killed at Virginia Tech in the US, a picture of the 2007 massacre was widely circulated as the 2011 event. In both instances, Storyful was quickly able to debunk this content as false.

But how to verify what's true? The challenge for news rooms in this new age of information overload is who and what to trust.

GET CLOSER TO THE SOURCE

From videos to 140-character tweets, we operate by the mantra that 'there is always someone closer to the source'.

Often we are alerted to videos that are duplicated and reposted. Finding the original source is the first step in our verification process and it can require several techniques. Image technology allows us to find the first instance of video thumbnails and images. Examining data embedded within the image provides more information. And by identifying keywords to run through search engines, we often find the first upload of a video or image.

Once we find the source of an item of content, for instance a YouTube video, we appraise that source like traditional print and broadcast journalists would any person. We engage with them and we investigate their digital footprint. Some of the questions we ask are:

- Where is this account registered and where has the uploader been based, judging by their history?
- Are there other accounts - Twitter, Facebook, a blog or website - affiliated with this uploader? What information do they bear to indicate recent location, activity, reliability, bias, agenda?
- How long have these accounts been in existence? How active are they?
- Do they write in slang or dialect that is identifiable in the video's narration
- Can we find WHOIS information for an affiliated website?
- Is the person listed in local directories? Do their online social circles indicate they are close to this story/location?
- Does the uploader 'scrape' videos from news organisations and other YouTube accounts, or do they upload solely user-generated content?
- Are the videos on this account of a consistent quality?
- Are video descriptions consistent and mostly from a specific location? Are they dated? Do they have file extensions such as .AVI or .MP4 in the video title?
- Are we familiar with this account - has their content and reportage been reliable in the past?

Answering several of these questions gives us an impression as to the reliability of a source of content.

Example 1: Aceh residents evacuate on tsunami alert

For instance, this video was posted to YouTube purporting to show residents of coastal Meulaboh, Aceh fleeing when the April 11 tsunami alert was issued.

Residents fleeing Meulaboh, Aceh 11 April 2012



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YmX97DbCd0M&feature=share&list=UUPn8mI56NAoyY1me5SjJW3w>

We could establish the following details about the uploader:

- The YouTube account listed Meulaboh as his hometown
- Several videos from Meulaboh were uploaded to the account in the six months before April 11
- The first tweet of this YouTube video was issued by an affiliated Twitter account, also based in Meulaboh, Aceh
- The Twitter user was actively tweeting from there in the weeks preceding the earthquake
- The uploader's blog reported from the area

✓ We could establish a valid email address and two Indonesian telephone numbers for the uploader

✓ Additional sources in the area reported that people were evacuating

✓ A shop awning fluttering in a corner of the video reads 'Meulaboh Lagoon'

Example 2: Sarah Churman hears her voice for the first time

One of the most compelling videos of 2011 shared on YouTube was this one of Sarah Churman hearing her voice for the first time. It has over 15 million views on YouTube at the time of writing.



<http://youtu.be/LsOo3jzkhYA>

Some local news outlets in Texas had discovered the video a couple of hours before we began our verification process. They incorrectly named Sarah as Sloan Churman (the name on the YouTube Channel). In applying our verification, we discovered:

- A previous video on the same YouTube account made reference to an Olivia

- This [Texan memorial page](#) remembers Ross Churman who is survived by son Sloan and Sarah Churman, and grand daughter Olivia
- [WhitePages.com](#) lists Sloan and Sarah Churman as associated people at an address in Burleson, Texas.
- [Sarah Churman's blog](#), in which she wrote a post on the experience, beginning: "Well, got my implant activated today! I've been nervous for days. Couldn't sleep last night."
- By applying verification to the video, we established not only its veracity, but the correct name for the subject and layers of context around Sarah's powerful story. We were able to contact Sarah and Sloan and put our news partners in the US in touch with them.

CORROBORATE THE CONTENT

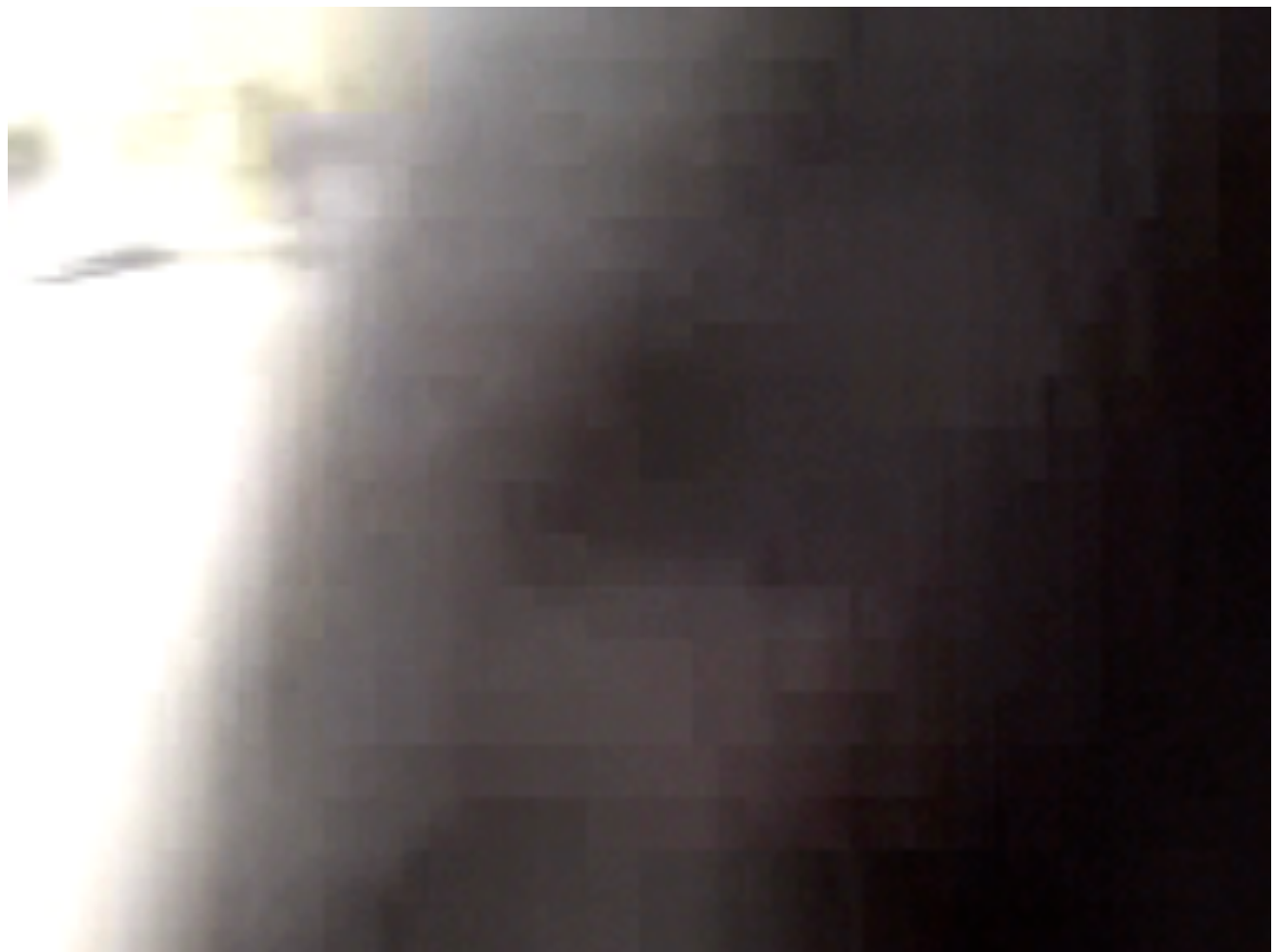
Once we have assessed an uploader, we focus on the content itself. Again, we ask the obvious questions - does the video make sense given the context in which it was filmed? Does anything jar with our journalistic instinct? Does anything look out of place, do clues suggest it is not legitimate? And we always look beyond the immediate to background detail:

- Can we geo-locate this footage? Are there any landmarks or topographical details that allow us to verify the location via Google Maps or Wikimapia?
- Do streetscapes tally with geo-located photos on Panoramio or Google Street-view?
- Do weather conditions tally with reports on that day?
- Do shadows tally with the time of day that this event reportedly happened?
- Do vehicle registration plates, signs or shopfronts indicate the country or state?
- Do accents or dialects heard in a video indicate the location?

- Does it tally with other videos/images people are uploading from this location?
- Does the video tally with events being reported (through Storyful's curated Twitter lists, news wires and local news reports)? What does the community we engage with say about this video?

If the video contains dialogue, do the accents or dialects fit the circumstances it purports to represent?

What additional information does the Storyful team have on it?



<http://youtu.be/UI8S5kO-vEM>

Example 3: Syrian forces enter Darkoush, Idlib on March 7

When our curated Twitter list was reporting that Syrian security forces were spreading into the Idlib province in early March, we discovered this video of armed forces reportedly driving through remote Darkoush.

The account was unfamiliar to us and we established the following:

- The YouTube account had uploaded several videos described as Darkoush in recent times.



- The videos depicted the same area. Rugged hillsides are visible in the back-drop beyond a long main street



- A distinctive corner mosque with a nearby Cypress tree is visible in this video at 25 seconds in, and in other video posted by the uploader

These details tallied with the satellite map below of Darkoush showing rugged hills.

Zooming in on this map, a the shadow of a minaret and a Cypress tree in corresponding proximity was visible at a corner along the main street:

In addition, the YouTube handle for this account is DarkoushRevo, suggesting that the account is primarily concerned with Darkoush. And the account is affiliated to Twitter and Facebook pages named Darkoush News.

These and other details reported from the area on the date give an indication as to its credibility.

Example 4: The killing of Shahid Nazir in Daraa, Syria

Some of the content in [this post](#) is too graphic to embed here, but interested readers can see how we applied verification to establish what happened to Shahid, a young Syrian man who went missing during the Saida massacre, near Daraa on April 29, 2011. Our starting point was an isolated video with scant detail, uploaded months after the event to a YouTube account based in northern Syria (the events were depicted as happening in the south). The process involved taking atoms of information from this 'scraped' video, and running searches on the place names listed and on the date reported. Our verification of the deceased led us to verified video of his funeral in his home town, and a tribute video a neighbour who was buried with him on the same date. Maps located his hometown within miles of Saida. His state of decay gave us a timeframe from his reported disappearance and his funeral. We discovered reports on the Saida massacre by Human Rights Watch and the Local Coordinating Committee in Syria providing context. We had documented video of these shootings at the time in our archive on StoryfulPro, providing further evidence and context.

At Storyful we are keenly aware of our responsibility to establish the facts. It's a responsibility to news clients, to readers and viewers, to those involved in the videos we see and to the wider story. The techniques outlined above allow us to scrutinise sources and items of content, discover new elements, and to get to the heart of a story.



FIRST PUBLISHED OCTOBER 2012

5

HOW TO SPOT A FAKE

BY FIONA MCCANN

Wowzah! Check out this image of Hurricane Sandy hitting NYC! Almost too good to be true, right? Well, more than almost, actually. It's a fake, a photoshopped version of a shot by stormchaser Mike Hollingshead that dates back to 2004. But it's been all over Twitter today, tweeted and retweeted thousands of times, even by established members of the journalism community.

 **Andrew Kaczynski**
@BuzzFeedAndrew Follow

=(That Awesome Hurricane Sandy Photo of the Statue of Liberty is fake. blogs.phillymag.com/the_philly_pos...

29 Oct 12 Reply Retweet Favorite

Twitter, in its marvelous self-correcting fashion, has been quick to debunk, and forced some to remove the image from their timeline and correct the error:

But this was not the only fake image doing the rounds on Monday as Instagram users went into a frenzy of photosharing, posting ten images of Hurricane Sandy per sec-

 **Jamster**
@jamster83 Follow

Amazing picture of hurricane #Sandy decending in New York
pic.twitter.com/3mMhCbNq



29 Oct 12 Reply Retweet Favorite

ond, **according to Instagram CEO Kevin System.**

Not all of the photos were photoshopped, but just because a photo is real, doesn't mean it shows what you think it shows.



Anonymous
@YourAnonNews



AMAZING PHOTO: Even a hurricane won't keep the honor guard from the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier this morning. #Sandy
pic.twitter.com/7smS3Odu



29 Oct 12

Reply Retweet Favorite

The photograph above turned out to be genuine, but here's the catch: it was taken in September, way before Sandy reared its ugly head.

So how do you avoid getting caught up in the speedy Sandy photo frenzy, and caught out by an errant retweet? Follow these three steps, for a start.

1. Wondering about the history of an image? Download it, or copy its URL, and use Google Image Search to throw up its online footprint. Simply go to images.google.com, click on the camera icon, and drag, upload or post the URL of the desired image in to the browser. It's also worth



Search by image ✕

Search Google with an image instead of text.

Paste image URL | [Upload an image](#)

installing the 'Search by image (Google)' **browser extension**, which, once installed, allows you to look up an image with a quick click of the mouse.

One simple right click on the top image in this story threw up a lengthy history, which included links to sites that showed it to have been previously debunked as a doctored photograph:

Pages that include matching images



400 × 267

[The Urban Legends Slide Show - New York City Tornado](http://urbanlegends.about.com/library/bl_slideshow1aaa.htm)

urbanlegends.about.com/library/bl_slideshow1aaa.htm

A gallery of odd and arresting images - some real, some fake, some persistently enigmatic - as circulated via email.



500 × 334

[Tornado almost everywhere in New York the Statue of Liberty](http://www.fixya.com/.../Tomado-almost-everywhere-in-New-York-the-St...)

www.fixya.com/.../Tomado-almost-everywhere-in-New-York-the-St...

Tornado blows into the city collapsed as Brooklyn. In **New York City**. There were deaths and 1 case by the radius of the storm is located just reach the Statue of ...



480 × 320

[snopes.com: New York Tornado](http://www.snopes.com/photos/natural/nystorm.asp)

www.snopes.com/photos/natural/nystorm.asp

Oct 2, 2010 – Photograph shows **tornado**-like storm clouds adjacent to the Statue of Liberty?

Which led to the site **extremestability.com** and Mike Hollinghurst's 2004 photograph from Nebraska:



Nebraska photograph on extremestability.com, courtesy of Mike Hollinghurst.

Look familiar?.

2. Another option for image searches is **TinEye**, a reverse image site which allows users to sort results by image size and by how much it's

Sort by:

Best Match

Most Changed

Biggest Image



[Compare](#) | [Link](#)

JPEG Image
959x716, 670.6 KB

netinago99.tumblr.com

tumblr.lkh0v3tNqj1qa1a22

netinago99.tumblr.com/post/16602833189

been modified. It came up with an immediate hit for the second photograph above, purporting to show Sandy “descending in New York”. The first return on a search dates the image as having been taken in the week of April 22 to 29, 2011. Whether that’s true or not is another question, but it’s safe to establish that whatever it is, it’s certainly not Sandy. Though TinEye may not always throw up as many results as Google’s version, it’s still been known to show alternative results and as such is often worth using as an additional tool to cast the hoax net as widely as possible.

3. Before you retweet, check with the source. If you see someone sending out an image, make contact, and ask them about it. Did they take the photograph themselves? If so, get details. Though this may not unmask a barefaced liar, it’s liable to winnow out those who are passing on unverified shots or someone just trying to catch folk out with a little canny photoshopping.

And while we’re on the subject of hoaxes, a word about video. Though much of Monday’s talk was about photoshopping and still images, news organizations need to ask the same questions about video as amateur filmmakers and citizen journalists get busy documenting Sandy. How do you know the video you’re watching is authentic? Can you be sure it’s of Hurricane Sandy, and not some previous storm? It’s worth paying close attention to the uploader’s history, and tallying the purported location with Google Maps of the area. For further tips on how to verify video, check out our previous chapter on our validation processes.

So bring your skepticism to Sandy even as social media buzzes with instant, awe-inspiring updates. Because you really, really don’t want your name on a tweet that ends up on a **site like this one**.

BuzzFeed's Andrew Kaczynski learned the hard way, and on Monday had a question for the tweeting masses for which Neal Mann, Social Media Editor at the Wall Street Journal, had an immediate answer:



Journalists, be on your guard.



FIRST PUBLISHED SEPTEMBER 2012

6

HOW TO LOCATE A VIDEO ON A MAP

BY GAVIN SHERIDAN

One of the newer skills to be required in journalism is verifying amateur videos. When watching a video from YouTube for example, you still have to approach it journalistically and ask the five W's. This post will concentrate on the 'where' question, and the tools journalists can use to establish the location in which a given video was shot.

At Storyful we've been watching videos and identifying locations for some time now. We've trained each other on tools and techniques that worked best, and practised

workflows around geolocating user-generated content, which has helped make this a speedier process than it might first appear. The truth is, the more time you spend using satellite photographs to identify locations in videos, the better and faster you become.

Let's take a case study to explain our process. The video below is one of the more challenging examples, given that it comes – or purports to come – from Syria, earlier this year:

Video purporting to be an explosion in Syria from June 2012



(<http://youtu.be/TuEC8rtQLA8>)

Verifying a video like this is further complicated by the language barrier. The Arabic title of the video reads:

تليسة 25 6 2012 قصف عنيف جدا على المدينة

... which translates, via Google Translate, as:

Paneling 25 6 2012 very heavy shelling of the city

Reading right to left gives you the word 'Paneling' or 'تليسة'. It might be clear that they don't really mean 'paneling' but if you don't speak Arabic, finding out what they do mean isn't easy. There are some tools, however, to help circumvent such obstacles.

One option is to put the Arabic word into Google Translate and [listen to it](#). In this instance, the computer voice says something like ‘Talbiseh’ – and as is sometimes the case, this name matches with the YouTube account that uploaded the video (when it comes to activist video like this one, there are often YouTube accounts dedicated to particular towns or regions).

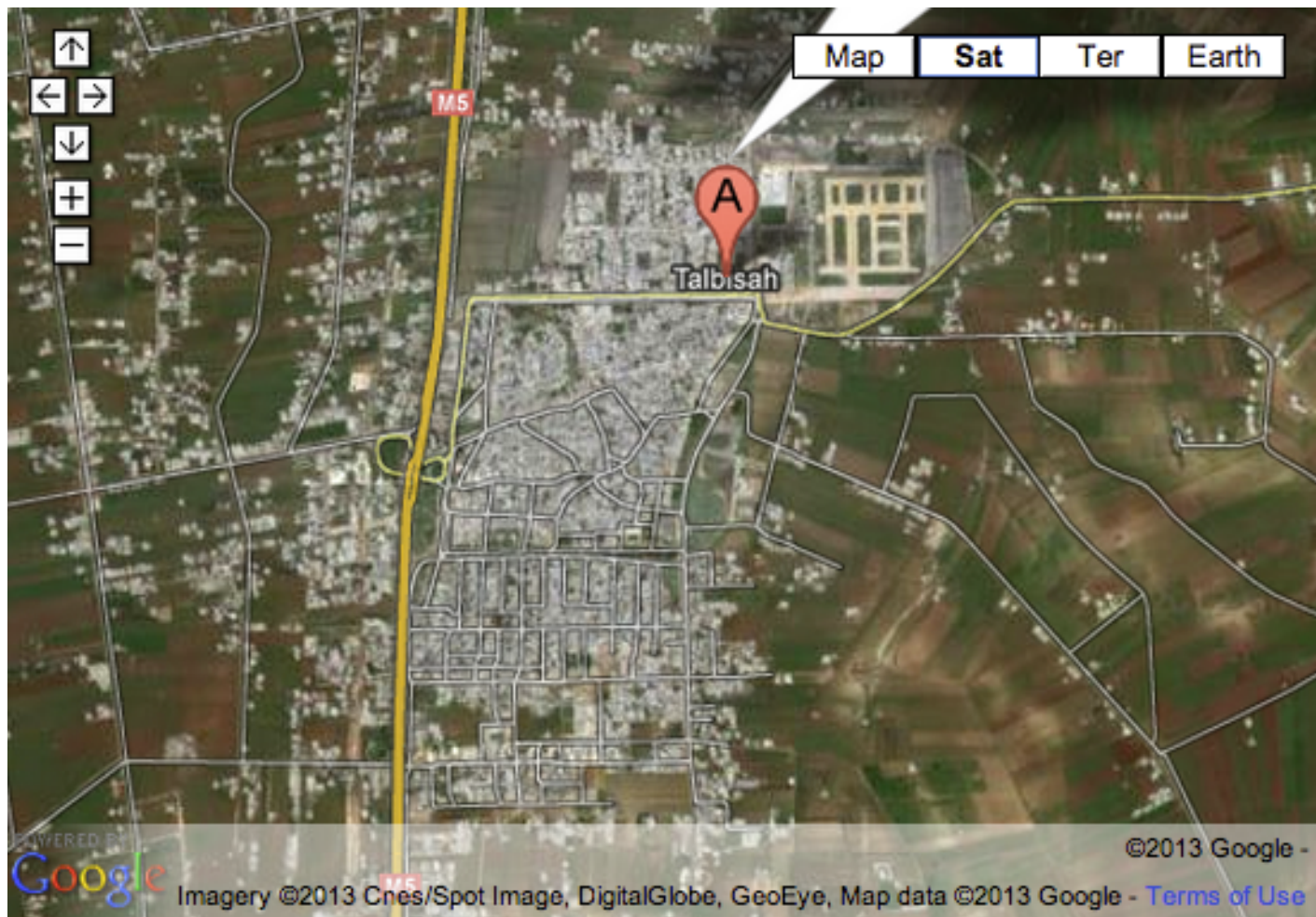
If you have no joy with the audio then another technique is to simply Google the Arabic word. This does not always work: there can be many, many variations of the spelling of placenames in Arabic and how they translate to English. It’s worth trying a few variations if the first search doesn’t come up trumps. In this case, Googling the word will bring you to this [Wikipedia page](#). Though the Wikipedia entry does not contain the coordinates of the town, it does describe it as north of the city of Homs – easy enough to identify on a map. You could also try searching Google Maps itself for the location, which in [this case brings up Talbisah](#).

As is the case with many countries, there is no Street View option for Syria. You have to make do with other sources of visual information. Our favorite is Google’s own Panoramio, which is a large database of geotagged images. It’s not always accurate but it helps you on your way – it’s also integrated with Google Maps and Google Earth so you can see photos that claim to be from the area you are interested in.

Of course Google Maps is not your only port of call – [OpenStreetmap](#), [Bing Maps](#) and others will invariably contain some information – and all can be useful in your investigation. Flickr also has a function that allows a [search for photos on a map](#). [Wiki-mapia](#) is another handy tool – a bit like Wikipedia for maps, it allows anyone to ‘tag’ a location and describe it. This is often useful for identifying districts or buildings that don’t show up on commercial map services like Google Maps. [Maplandia](#) has some similar features.

Ultimately all of these sources assist in an effort to establish whether the video was shot where the uploader claims it was shot. In this case, looking at Talbiseh was our first action. And here it is:

[View larger map](#)



Next, we looked for identifying features. There are two very clear ones in the video. One is the long ridge line and row of buildings along it, and the second is the minaret of a mosque:

[View larger map](#)



Using Google Earth to change the vantage point and look at topological features helps too. This approximates the view of the videographer:



With the minaret visible directly in the foreground we can establish the approximate location of the videographer. And hey presto, we've answered the 'where' question. To people just starting out with this technique, what is outlined above can take some time. With practice it gets easier – after months of this work, we identified the location of this particular video in less than five minutes. Some videos take a little more work, but a sense for situational awareness and for detail can help you narrow the time it takes.



FIRST PUBLISHED IN OCTOBER 2012

7

FIND THAT FIREBALL! WHEN JOURNALIST TURNS STALKER

BY MALACHY BROWNE

A woman is filming a thunderstorm when lightning strikes a tree metres from the camera. A fireball explodes, the woman jumps back, shouting “Oh shit!”. Video gold, a segment any local news network would love to broadcast. Judge for yourself:

YouTube video filmed by Rita Krill of a lightning strike in her back garden

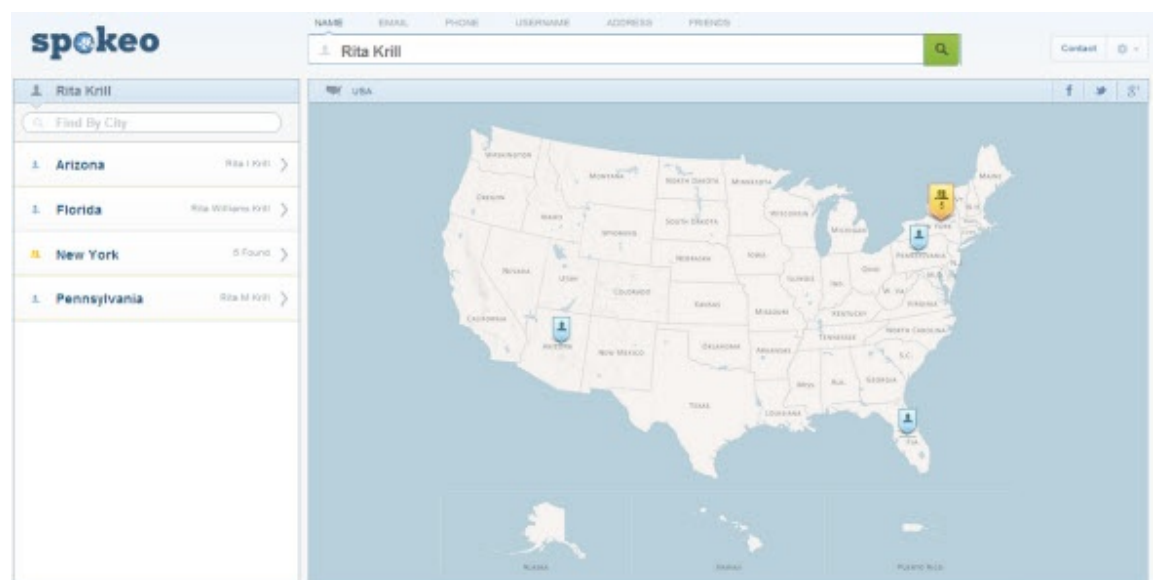


<http://youtu.be/AbSsVwurkFA>

Initially, we had suspicions. Is this video a set-up? Or an old clip copied from elsewhere and reposted as new? Because if not, we knew this was something news organizations would be interested in. So we set about sleuthing. The first stop, the video itself, revealed very little: No specific location was attached, no date specified, and this was the sole video uploaded to the YouTube account on which it appeared. The woman in the video had no discernible accent, despite our best efforts to make one out. All we had to go on was the YouTube account name, Rita Krill.

The next step was to look for Rita on the people search engine, **Spokeo**. Several possibilities were returned, including Arizona, Pennsylvania, five people in New York and one person in Naples, Florida.

Back to the video for more clues. As the camera



panned across the garden, we saw palm trees come into view – not so common in New York, perhaps, but pretty ubiquitous in Florida. We honed in on Naples, Florida.

The knowledge database **Wolfram Alpha** returned the weather report below for Naples, Florida on the date the video was uploaded (October 5), and the word thunderstorm leaped out. The average temperature of 79 degrees Fahrenheit in the report below also mirrored the estimate of 77 degrees to 80 degrees Fahrenheit from the woman narrating the video.

The screenshot shows the Wolfram Alpha interface. At the top is the logo "WolframAlpha" with the tagline "computational... knowledge engine". Below it is a search bar containing the text "Weather, Naples Florida on October 5". Underneath the search bar, the input is interpreted as "weather" for "Naples, United States" on "Friday, October 5, 2012". The main result is a table titled "Recorded weather for Naples, United States:" with the following data:

time range	day of Friday, October 5, 2012
temperature	(72 to 89) °F (average: 79 °F)
conditions	rain, thunderstorm, fog, overcast, cloudy, partly cloudy
relative humidity	(65 to 100)% (average: 91%)
wind speed	(0 to 21) mph (average: 8 mph)

At the bottom of the screenshot, it says "Computed by Wolfram Mathematica" and provides links for "Sources" and "Download page".

This was supported by a tweet sent by Florida weatherman, John Patrick suggesting stormy weather in South West Florida on October 5:

The screenshot shows a tweet from John Patrick (@jpweather) dated 5 Oct 12. The tweet text is: "Tweet your weather pics #SWFL! Storm clouds, rainbows, downpours, etc. let's see what's happening near you! #FortMyers #CapeCoral #Naples". The tweet includes a profile picture of John Patrick, a "Follow" button, and interaction icons for Reply, Retweet, and Favorite.

So back to Rita Krill, listed in Spokeo as living in Naples, FL. A simple Facebook search came up with a public profile for a Rita Krill in Naples, Florida. The street address in Naples was confirmed by Whitepages.com. On to Google Maps, to zoom in on the address in question, and straight away we could see the curved masonry of the swimming pool, the same white airbed floating on the pool, palm trees out back and a lagoon at the end of the garden – all filmed in the video above.



Spokeo and WhitePages.com also listed the same telephone number for Rita. So we kicked it old skool, and gave her a call. Rita gave us a riveting first-hand account of the lightning strike, and told us how it scarred several feet of the tree bark and blew light at the base of the tree, which explains the second flash in the video above. She even emailed photos of the damage (below).



Our friends at ABC and the Weather Channel broadcast the video and ran an interview with Rita, testament to the compelling nature of her story and the dramatic video she shot. At time of writing, the fireball video clocks in at over 630,000 hits on YouTube. And no more thunderstorms are forecast for Rita's back garden.



FIRST PUBLISHED IN OCTOBER 2012

8

THE BATTLE FOR MAARAT: USING SOCIAL MEDIA TO CUT THROUGH THE FOG OF WAR

BY JOE GALVIN

Following Syria's civil war is never easy. The old adage that the first casualty of war is the truth still applies, and such is the relentless brutality it is often difficult to even confirm when an incident took place. But we've been following the Syrian conflict through social media since the beginning, and have developed a number of methods of cutting through the fog of war to get a clearer picture of what's taking place in the embattled state. The recent battle for Maarat al-Numan was a case in point. Activist sources are almost always our starting point, and it was through activists sources on Storyful's

Syria Twitter list that we first heard of the destruction of a helicopter near this north-western city on October 17. The information was also posted to the **Facebook page of Syria's local coordinating committees** (LCCs).

Our first step in these instances is to get closer to the story, usually by finding a local activist or LCC Facebook page in the town in which the incident occurred. Syrian activists, in particular the LCCs, almost invariably have a strong social media presence, and Maarat al-Numan proved no exception, with a **regularly updated Facebook page** calling itself the 'Revolutionary Command Council in Maarat'. The page contained **corroborating information regarding the destruction of the helicopter**, and an **in-distinct video purporting to show the attack** was also posted to the page. Other Maarat al-Numan based activists also **tweeted about the incident**.

Using the relevant Arabic search terms on YouTube, we found several other videos of the same incident, including this high-quality footage of the helicopter exploding in mid-air:

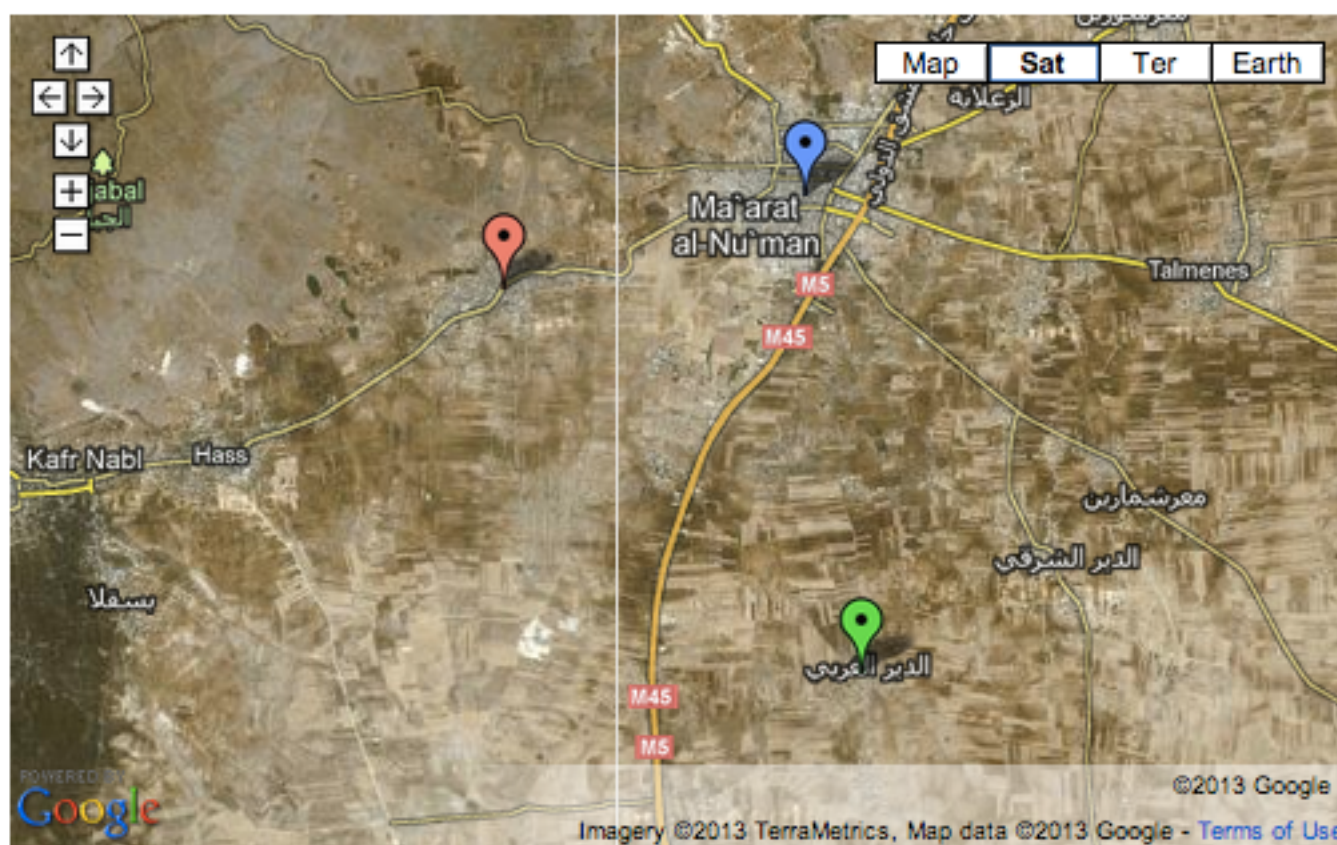
Mid-air helicopter explosion



<http://youtu.be/bTmRZn98Xxl>

The problem, as always, was finding a way to make sure that what we were seeing had really taken place when and where it was being reported. We often start with attempting to geolocate a video like the one above ([see tips on how to geolocate a video here](#)), but the absence of notable landmarks this time made it tricky. So we moved on to a closer look at the [YouTube account](#) where it had been uploaded and noted that it posted videos exclusively from Maarat al-Numan and its surrounding areas. The video description stated the incident had taken place in Deir al-Gharbi (الدير الغربي), just outside Maarat al-Numan. The account also added [this short clip](#) of the chopper under fire on the same day. The uploader uses the same fonting across all of the videos, another clue that they were likely originals.

Next we looked for supporting evidence. The events depicted in the video were backed up by videos from surrounding areas, such as [this video](#) from [a familiar account](#) in Morek in which the caption and a voice at the start of the video mention Kafr Ruma, which is just outside Maarat al-Numan. As seen in [this map](#), all of these locations lie just a short distance from each other, with Maarat al-Numan marked by the blue arrow, Deir al-Gharbi the red, and Kafr Ruma the green:



We also made contact with an English-speaking Maarat al-Numan-based activist through the Facebook page, who directly engaged with us about the event. The activ-

ist, a moderator of the page, confirmed the destruction of the helicopter and said that Syrian forces were attacking the town “every day... by helicopter and other fighting planes”.

The retaliation of the Syrian army to the downed helicopter was swift and severe. On October 18, activists reported that air strikes were launched against Maarat al-Numan and surrounding areas. Once again, we made contact with the local activist via Skype, who said air strikes landed “near his home”. Several videos of the attacks emerged from Maarat al-Numan and the surrounding areas.

The video below was uploaded by the **2021maher1** account which has been uploading content exclusively from Maarat al-Numan for several months. It was linked to a Maarat al-Numan-based Facebook page. We had verified and used videos from this uploader in the past, and considered the account a reliable and trustworthy source.



<http://youtu.be/B7Clrc70Kok>

Activists also tweeted about attacks on towns near to Maarat al-Numan. **This final video**, shows an enormous explosion in the town of Maarat Hurma (معرفة حرمة), near to

Maarat al-Numan. It is dated October 18 and was shared by a Maarat al-Numan-based Facebook account, which lent it further credence.



<http://youtu.be/sg963HyhpJ4>

The distinctive water tower and minaret seen in the video helped us **confirm the location** as Maarat Hurma, using Google Maps:

Activists also tweeted about attacks on towns near to Maarat al-Numan. This final video, shows an enormous explosion in the town of Maarat Hurma (معرة حرمة), near to Maarat al-Numan. It is dated October 18 and was shared by a Maarat al-Numan-based Facebook account, which lent it further credence. The distinctive water tower and minaret seen in the video helped us confirm the location as Maarat Hurma, using Google Maps:



In journalism, there is no substitute for having a trusted reporter on the ground. However, media organizations simply do not have the resources to be everywhere at once. Citizen journalists and activists, on the other hand, are everywhere. Their reporting may be unreliable, sometimes misleading and even downright false, but that doesn't mean such reports should be discarded. Careful interrogation of a source, methodical research and sometimes a simple phone call can help parse and verify information coming through these channels, often the only information on the subject that's available to news organizations.

It's not about replacing journalism: it's about asking the same questions and applying the same journalistic values in an ever-evolving media landscape. We weren't on the ground during the Battle for Maarat, but the witnesses were many and they have new ways of documenting and disseminating what they see and experience. Our job was to find them – to interrogate their story and the evidence they shared – and through them, the truth.

Credit to Storyful's Jenny Hauser and Eoghan mac Suibhne for their efforts in verifying much of the content in this entry.



FIRST PUBLISHED IN MAY 2012

9

WHEN YOUTUBE BECOMES YOUR DOORSTEP

BY ÁINE KERR

Securing those precious few minutes with a Senator or member of cabinet, after the formal and predictable political set-piece, was once part of my day-to-day beat as a political correspondent. I was on the campaign bus, on the rope lines, hovering at the back of halls, watching and waiting for that nugget of information, that gaffe, that leak that might deliver a delicious scoop.

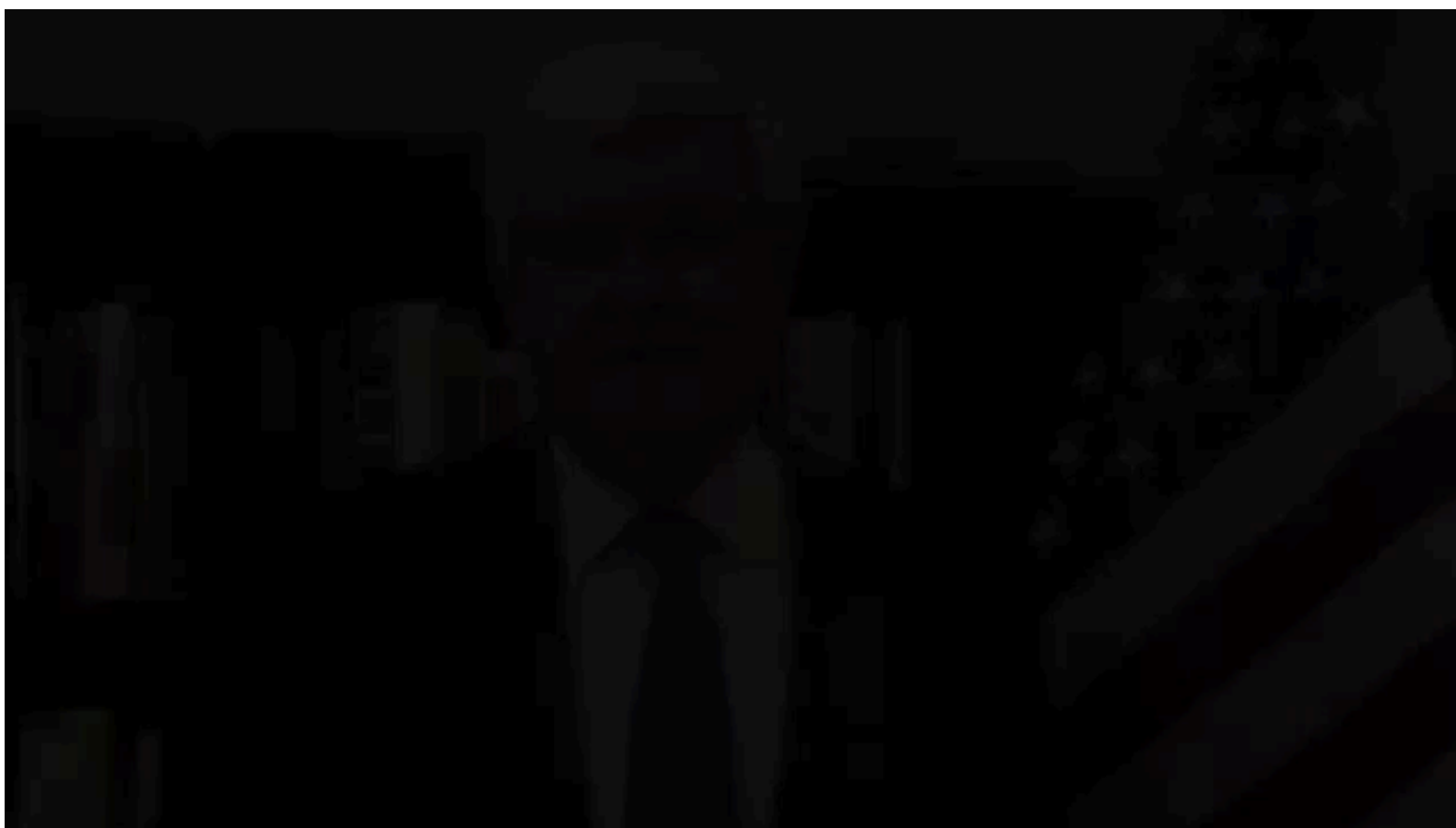
Every morning now as Storyful's Political Editor, however, begins by monitoring the frantic tweets of weary political journalists running through airport terminals, hoping to make connecting flights as they dash from state to state trying to keep pace with whirlwind politicians. While they're boarding the delayed flights and taking to the skies, I'm taking to YouTube to begin my doorstep. There, some of the rules of traditional doorstepping still apply, even if the technology and means of securing a story differ to those on the ground. The output of our doorstepping ends up on Google's US elections page and the Economist's Electionism App, while a subscription channel with a continuous stream of video, tweets and stories is made available to clients such as The New York Times, ABC News and France 24.

1. News Sources: Knowing who and where

Every hour of every day of every month, the Storyful political team trawls YouTube for new ads by presidential candidates, Senate candidates, vice-presidential hopefuls, PACs, Super PACs, campaign groups, supporter groups and trade unions. Every movement on their official YouTube channels is monitored. Our other doorstepping activity moves to Facebook, Twitter and Google+, with each platform enabling us to operate akin to air traffic controllers. As a social media news agency dedicated to finding and verifying videos, tweets, and pictures from across 50 states, we stubbornly and relentlessly pursue all leads.

And, day in, day out, we discover videos and ads freshly cooked up for us on YouTube, before they've been born to Twitter, Facebook, blogs, online articles and beyond. Newt Gingrich's video message to his supporters, announcing his intention to withdraw the following day, was one such example. At the time of discovery on May 1 at 8am Eastern time, the Gingrich video showed zero views, had no Twitter mentions, no online references, no life outside of YouTube and was unknown to the world without. With the video verified, contextualized and Storyful-ed, our clients were alerted and its life began. It became someone else's scoop.

Newt Gingrich announces he's leaving the race



<http://youtu.be/gSDIW1CBiuo>

In such moments of discovery, there is no advantage to being on the campaign bus, being on the delayed flight or being at the postponed and rescheduled doorstep. It's a doorstep in the social media sense, a new and different kind of scoop. Often, it's as thrilling as being the only one to doorstep a candidate, securing an exclusive and once-off soundbite.

2. News sense: Spotting a potential story

On April 3, 2012 when tweets rolled in on Storyful's advanced Twitter searches that Mitt Romney and Paul Ryan were handing out sandwiches in Waukesha, Wisconsin, as the state went to the polls, our senses screamed "Story!". A potential president and potential vice-president handing out sandwiches and dealing with slightly bemused customers needed to be seen to be believed. But more importantly, it instantly raised questions about the ethics of engaging with voters in this way on voting day. I opened half a dozen new YouTube tabs, searching multiple key phrases and words, refreshing, re-entering, re-wording and refining. Eventually, through rigorous trial and error, we found a video showing what had happened.

#SUBGATE: Romney Ryan hand out Subs for Votes in Waukesha



<http://youtu.be/J4k4LIVL7eE>

An hour later, #subgate had taken off. The Democratic Wisconsin Party was outraged at the publicity stunt and filed a complaint with the Government Accountability Board accusing the GOP candidate of “election bribery”.

3. Persistence: Knowing the story will come

When the GOP presidential candidates were heckled or glitter-bombed, when Romney was asked about his Mormon faith by an audience member, when Occupy protesters pulled off “mic-checks”, when Ron Paul supporters turned out in their thousands for rallies, when Romney and Gingrich held up Etch-a-Sketches at rallies, or when a Missouri caucus was shut down, trust and persistence were rewarded with quality video from people on the ground pulling out their phones to capture a moment in time. Equally, when tweets emerged revealing that Romney had been pranked by his own campaign staff and led into an empty rally on April Fool’s Day, we in Storyful knew one person would have the video: Romney’s so-called bodyman Garret Jackson, better known as @dgjackson on Twitter or DG Jackson on YouTube. Often, we sit with multiple advanced YouTube and Twitter searches and tabs open, each asking different

questions, with different words and phrases hoping to capture video as soon as someone presses “upload”. In this case, two simple tabs were opened: one for Jackson on Twitter and one for Jackson YouTube. The stakeout began. It wasn’t long before the

April Fools' Day Prank on the Governor



http://youtu.be/dk4I2PXS_gk

doorstep was over, with the arrival of the video we were looking for.

4. News Obsession: Spotting the patterns

All day every day we doorstep the candidates, the states, the PACs, the campaigners, the supporters and we come to quickly spot re-uploaded videos with new dates, and can immediately discount them. We learn to identify new and familiar videographers, all of whom become “sources” in the YouTube doorstep scenario. Each time, we discover a video of news value, it is duly matched to candidate calendars, local and national reports, Google maps and Twitter updates, as part of the verification process. And because we watch and rewatch videos, often dozens and dozens each day, we come to quickly spot the patterns. It wasn’t a politician, campaigner, financier, or voter who provided the political team with the most captivating story of the year to date, but a nine-year-old from Iowa whose videos kept cropping up on our political radar. Sam Wessels had us in awe, thanks to five videos uploaded to YouTube by his mother Lin.

The videos showed Mitt Romney, Rick Santorum, Newt Gingrich, Ron Paul and Michele Bachmann respectively being asked by Sam about their policies for children with disability, in particular those with autism.

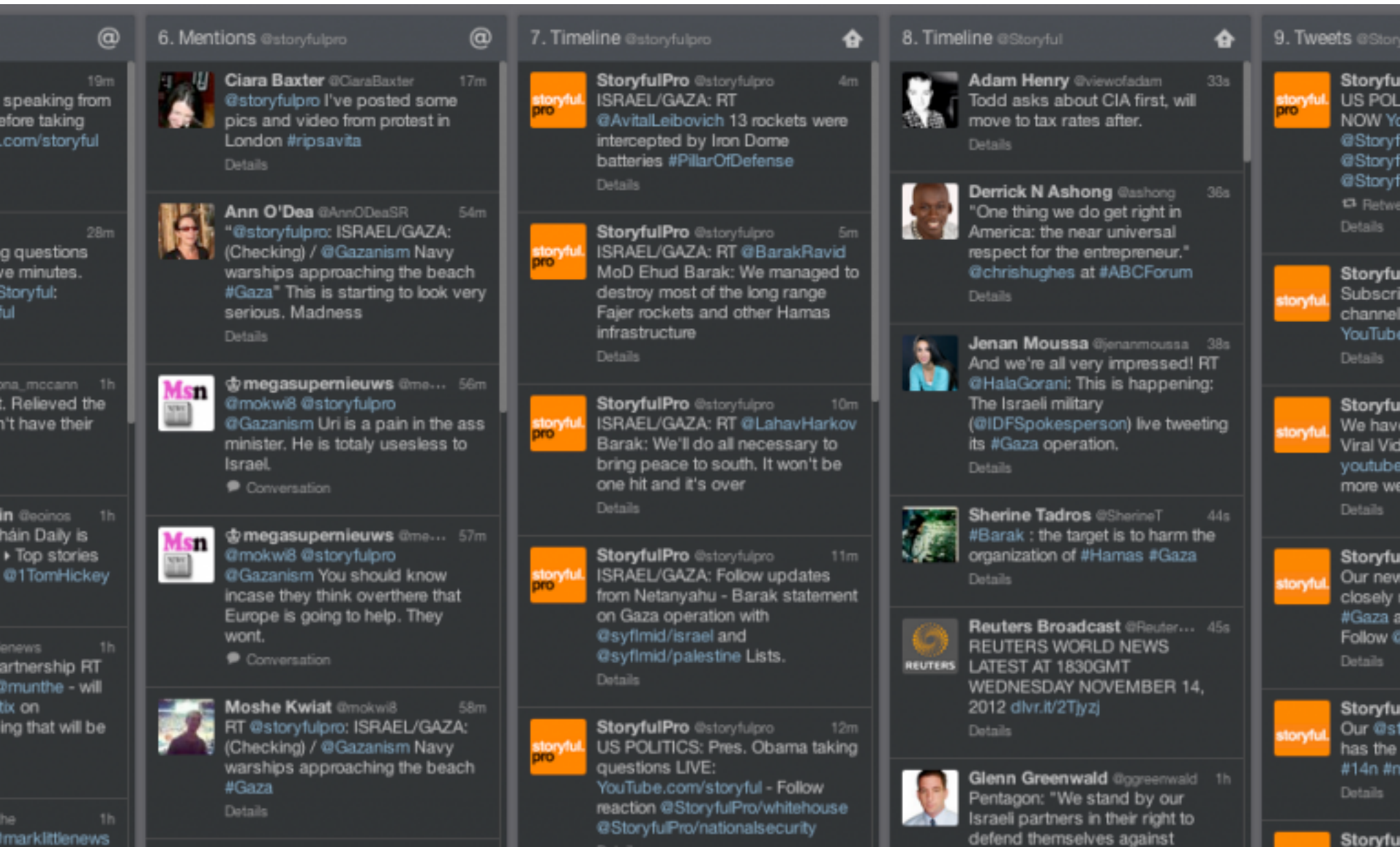
Sam asks Mitt Romney about autism



<http://youtu.be/NaWNrltkjBE>

An insatiable appetite for US politics and a drive to know and understand the personalities and policies are what drive the political team each day in Storyful. We find and alert ads before they're discovered or advertised. We discover the first-time videographers at rallies and protests, and help share their story. We chase video when a story has words but no visual. We crystal-ball gaze, envisioning the potential stories, and prepare our doorsteps before the story breaks. Always, we take pride in offering unfiltered raw politics: no candidate, no issue, no state is ignored or forgotten if video, pictures, and tweets can reveal something about democracy in action.

Personally, I'm unlikely to return soon to running through airport terminals in a state-to-state adventure, or to stand on the rope line, waiting, waiting for the three-minute doorstep with a candidate. I will, however, be waiting on YouTube for the stories taking place away from the rope line and off the campaign bus. YouTube has become my doorstep.



FIRST PUBLISHED IN NOVEMBER 2012

10

BECOMING A PROFESSIONAL TWEETDECK USER

BY FÉLIM MCMAHON

When Twitter rolled out new Tweetdeck in 2011, it was met with gasps of horror from several directions. The update seemed like a dumbed-down version of Iain Dods-worth's 2008 classic and came with significant teething problems including the **huge swath of dead space on the right**, the missing edit and ReTweet option, clunky column

controls and next-to-impossible list management. For a historical list of the pros and cons, [this detailed blog post](#) is one of the best we've seen.

Journalists and other power users largely ignored the new arrival (and several updates), preferring to stick to the older and more feature-rich original. This included many of the team at Storyful.

Two things happened this autumn that made us take a fresh look at new Tweetdeck. The first and most important factor was the announcement of [API changes](#) that could affect users of 'old' Tweetdeck ([0.38.1](#)) from March 2013. As Tweetdeck is one of our core tools, we needed to re-examine the updated product with these changes in mind.

Happily, news of the API changes coincided with significant improvements to new Tweetdeck. Many outstanding issues have been addressed in two major updates, making it a product we want to use.

Among journalists, [a hint of skepticism](#) remains. This tweet from Reuters' Anthony De



Rosa spoke to the lingering frustration of many power users.



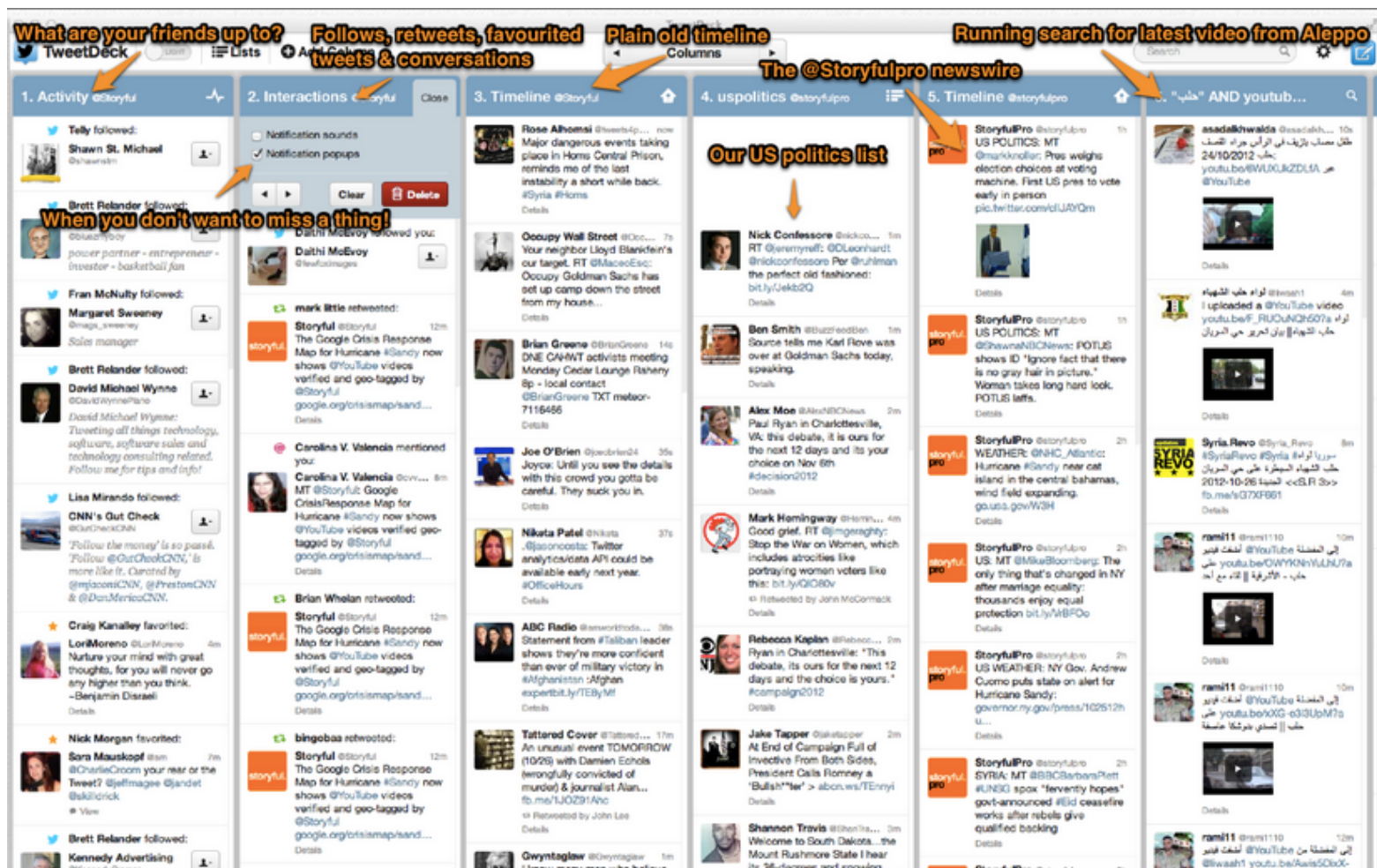
Other journalists were impressed. This tweet is from USA Today's social media editor: This article examines some reasons why those who are not using Tweetdeck should use it — including a tour using quick-fire diagrams. I'll also look at some reasons why

people who have avoided the new Tweetdeck might want to make peace with it, and some workarounds for its remaining shortcomings. (Aficionados handling a large number of lists may like to skip to the end of the piece for some handy tips.)

Why use Tweetdeck?

The best and perhaps singular reason to use Tweetdeck is to monitor and manage a large number of Twitter streams at once. Many of the streams you'll want to keep an eye on are related to your own account — including your Timeline, Interactions and the Activity column.

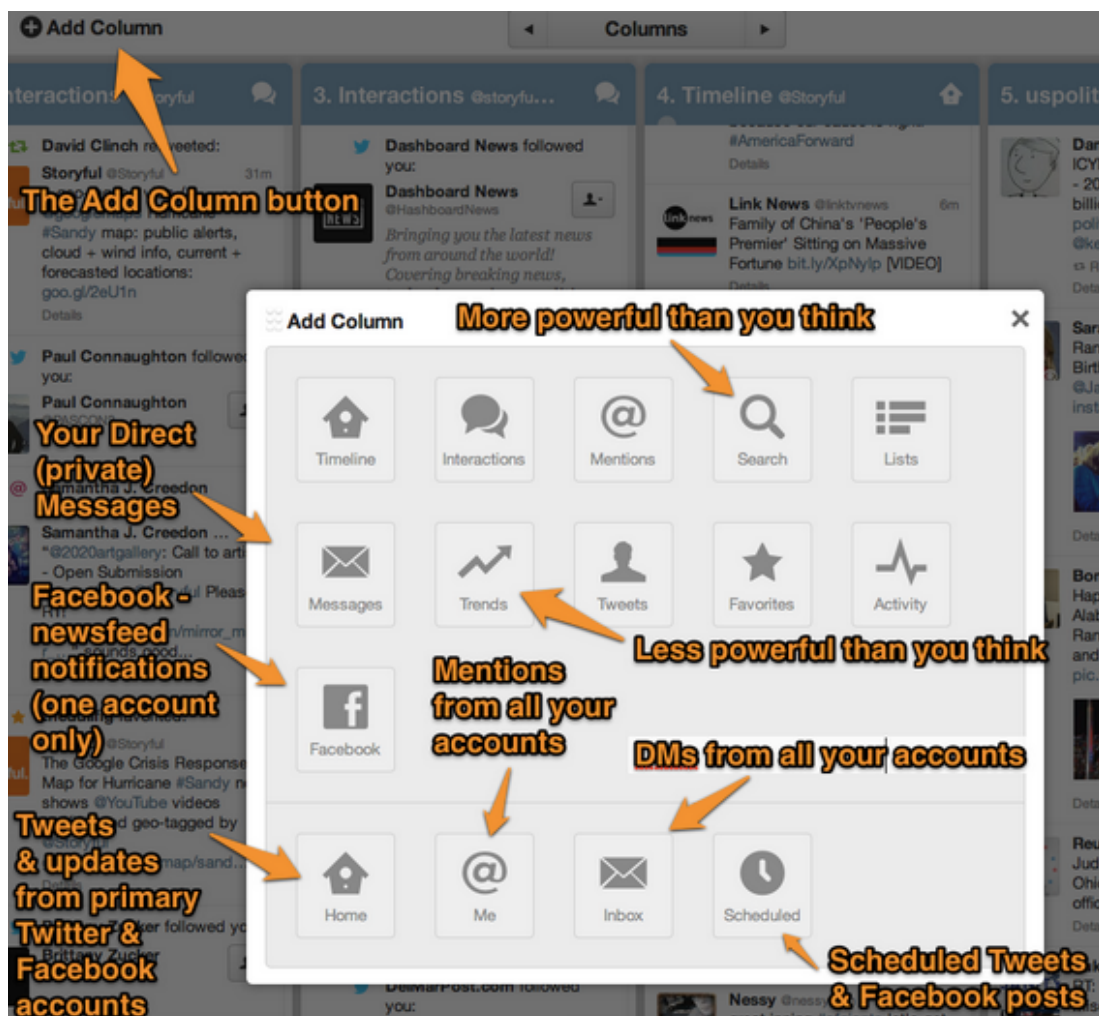
You might also like to have a list of your own tweets open too, or one displaying your favourites. The screenshot below shows [@Storyful](#) at work, with a selection of columns open that allow whoever is manning the account to monitor the effectiveness of our tweets; keep tabs on the activity of accounts we follow; watch our 24/7 [@Storyful-Pro](#) newswire and discover newsworthy video.



Some of the main features to note are:

1. The Interactions column is the place to be. It tells you when someone follows you, favourites one of your tweets or ReTweets you. More importantly, you can carry on conversations here. Hit the 'View' button underneath any message and the full thread opens up, allowing you to view and continue the conversation. If you want a less cluttered column of your conversations, add the 'Mentions' column, which excludes ReTweets, favourites and follows. Direct messages work in the same way, via the 'Messages' column. A blue dot indicates that someone may be waiting for a response from you!

2. The Activity column is a great way to keep tabs on your network, delivering real-time information on the latest favourites and follows on all the accounts you follow. It can help you discover interesting people, tweets and links you might otherwise miss.



It can also help with serendipitous discovery:

There are a few points to note:

1. The Facebook column is limited to one account only. This will be the first account you added to Tweetdeck. Don't worry if you added the wrong account. You can simply delete it and start again.
2. Trends is less powerful than you think: Delivering only a smattering of global trends, and no options for configuration, the Trends column looks like a placeholder for better things to come. Watch this space for now, and use [Trendsmap](#).
3. The Search column is more powerful than you think: [Advanced search operators](#) transform this stream from a simple keyword search into a powerful tool for discovery. In our example above, we use a simple combination to scour for tweeted videos across multiple platforms using the Arabic word for the city of Aleppo, in northern Syria, as part of a long string that looks like this: "حلب" youtube OR twitvid OR yfrog OR qik OR vimeo OR video OR vid. Other advanced operators allow you to scour by location, date and even sentiment. A major limitation in the search functionality has been removed in a [November 7 update](#), with Tweetdeck users now able to edit their searches as they go. Huzzah!
4. Combined or 'aggregated' columns help you cut down on clutter: The bottom line in the image above contains three aggregated columns. The 'Home' column displays your primary account's Twitter Timeline and updates from your Facebook Newsfeed. The 'Me' column displays mentions on all your added Twitter accounts, and lets you converse while the 'Inbox' does the same for your private messages.

Tweetdeck also offers a powerful suite of tools for processing individual accounts, allowing you to easily interact with them or explore their Activity, Mentions, Lists, Timeline and Favorites. Some of the more in-depth exploration options bring you to the Twitter website where, for instance, you can see what lists someone has been added to, who they are following and who is following them. Following somebody from your primary account is as easy as hitting the big 'Follow' button:



Clicking the head-and-shoulders icon with the drop-down arrow (which also appears beside new followers in your Interactions column) brings up even more options, allowing you to interact, follow, list or delist someone from all your accounts:



Storyful – an edge case

Our tech team, when they are not busy building the tools we'll need tomorrow, are fond of telling us that the Storyful newsroom is an edge case. Twitter lists are a great example of how we max out the capacity of our favourite tools.

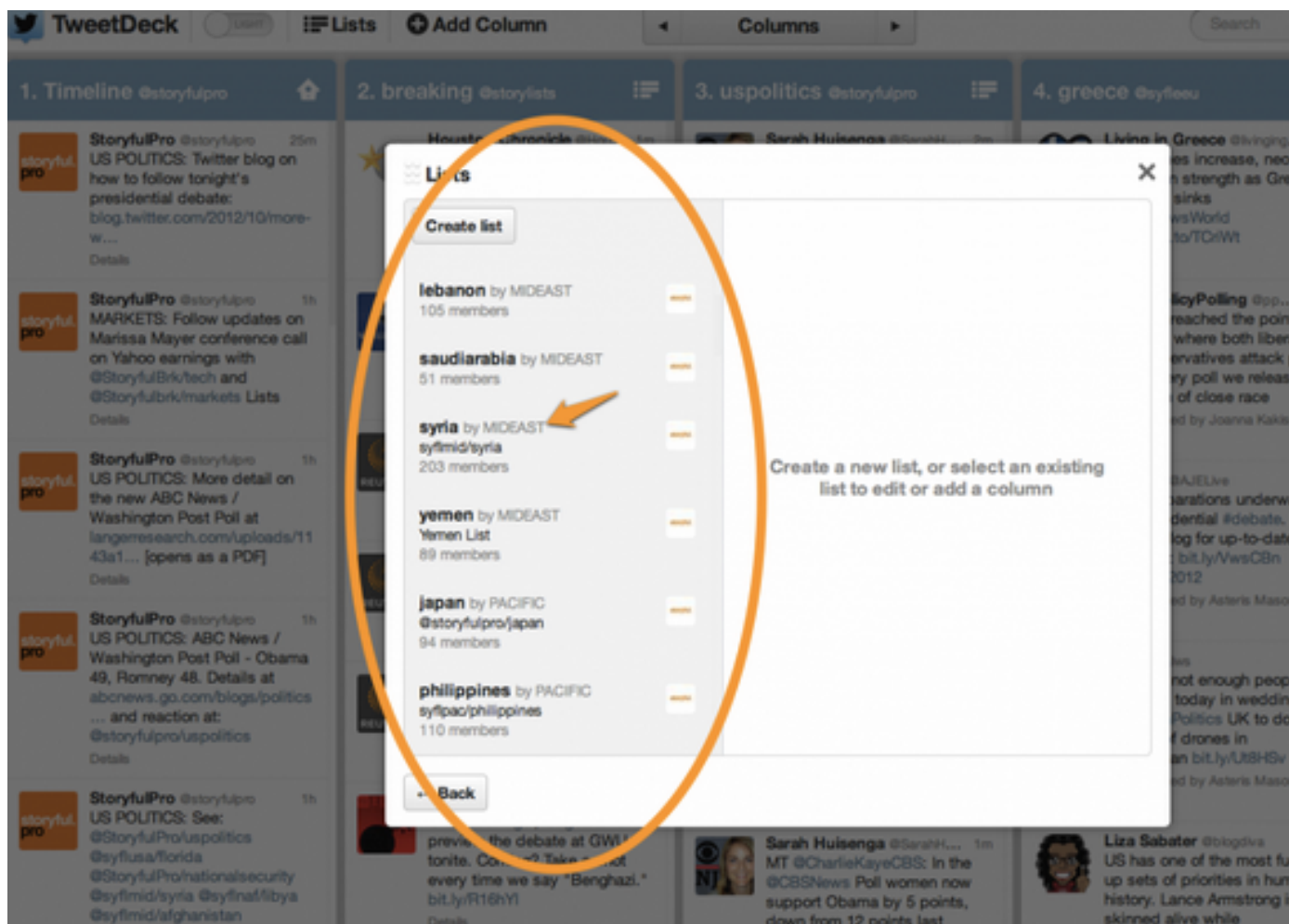
A vital component of the discovery system at Storyful, our array of hundreds of Twitter lists covers every country in the world and every topic imaginable. The lists are constantly evolving, with new members being added by the team 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

At any one time, a Storyful journalist's Tweetdeck will be charged with 20-30 lists, with the new product allowing us to run many more columns than before. Due to a 20-list limit, these are spread across scores of Twitter accounts. One of the main gripes we have about new Tweetdeck concerns its still-clunky handling of lists.

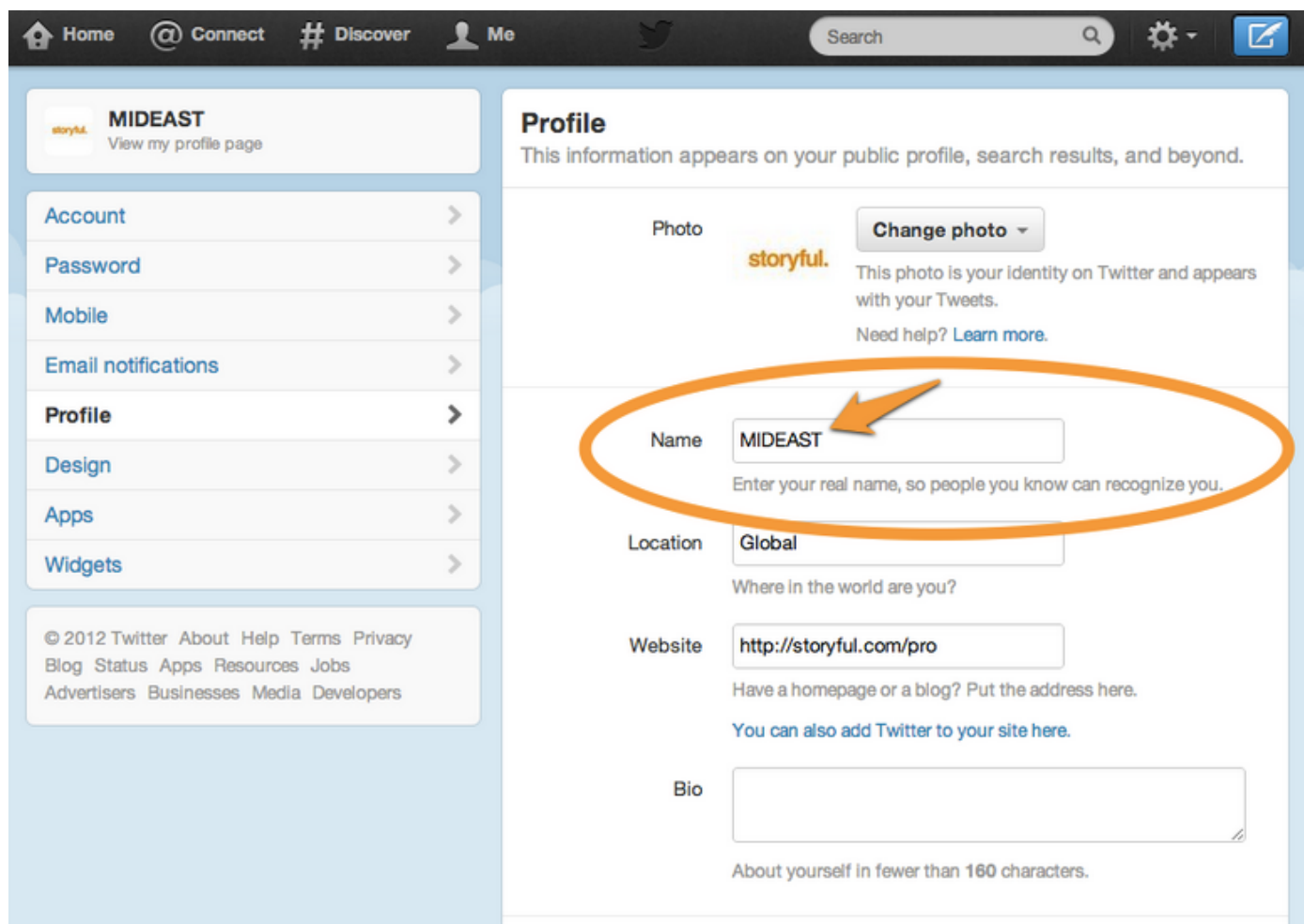
Although there have been huge improvements with regard to curating lists in the last two updates, actually finding the list you want can still be tricky. This isn't a problem if you're running a small number of lists in a static pattern, and new Tweetdeck's synchronizing columns are a joy if you're on the move. If you curate hundreds of lists across scores of Twitter accounts in real-time, however, finding and adding them can be a time-consuming (and frustrating) experience.

Tips for handling a large number of lists

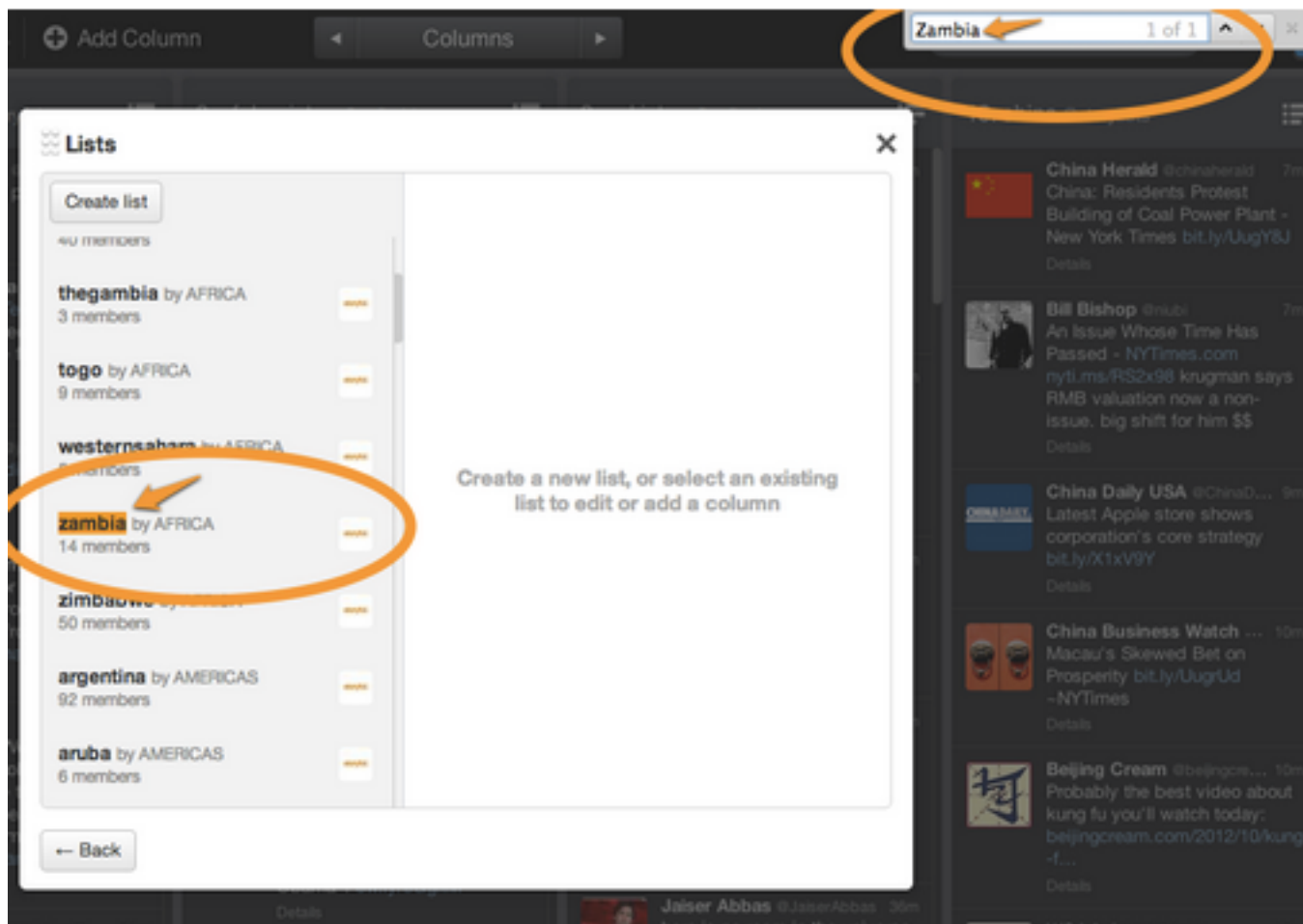
1. Give your lists 'real' names: If you don't fancy scrolling down through a long list of lists every time you want to add a column, this workaround may help. By default, Tweetdeck orders its lists alphabetically by their owner's so-called 'real' or display name, which can be changed via Twitter's Profile settings. You can give two different Twitter accounts the same display name, which is handy if you want to group more than 20 lists (spread across multiple Twitter accounts). In the image below, you can see how our Middle East lists, which are spread across a number of Twitter accounts, are all grouped by their shared display name 'Mideast':



To change the display name of the accounts holding your lists, use the **profile settings** on Twitter.com:

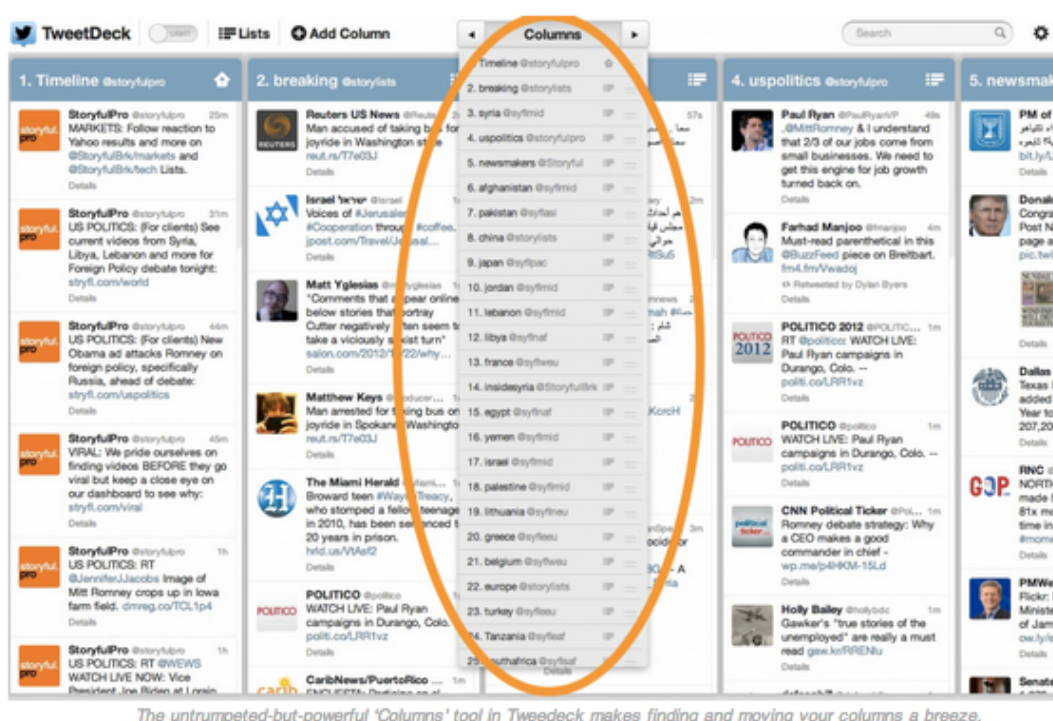


2. Use Find on the web app: One of the distinct advantages of the Chrome App is that you can use Ctrl-F to find what you're looking for in that long list of lists:



Update: Tweetdeck gave us several new reasons to stop worrying and love it with the November 7 update that has made searching for your (or any other) lists as easy as typing the name into the search bar in the format @username/listname. To say we're happy about this would be an understatement. We are actually dizzy with joy.

The hidden power of the Columns bar



The untrumpeted-but-powerful 'Columns' tool in Tweeddeck makes finding and moving your columns a breeze.

Without much fanfare, a huge improvement to how Tweetdeck handles columns was rolled out in last summer's update. Hitting the Columns button brings up a list of open columns, which can be moved by dragging and dropping items on the list. Additionally, navigating to a column is as simple as clicking on it.

Tweetdeck still lacks some features we would like to see onboard — for instance the ability to filter columns by keyword or favourite tweets from any account — but it has come along far enough for us to use it in our daily work. We hope that those of you who have yet to use it find this helpful, and that it helps others making the transition from ‘old’ to ‘new’ Tweetdeck.



<http://www.flickr.com/photos/desiitaly/2105224119/>

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11

MAKING LISTS: HOW TO FINE-TUNE YOUR TWITTER ANTENNAE

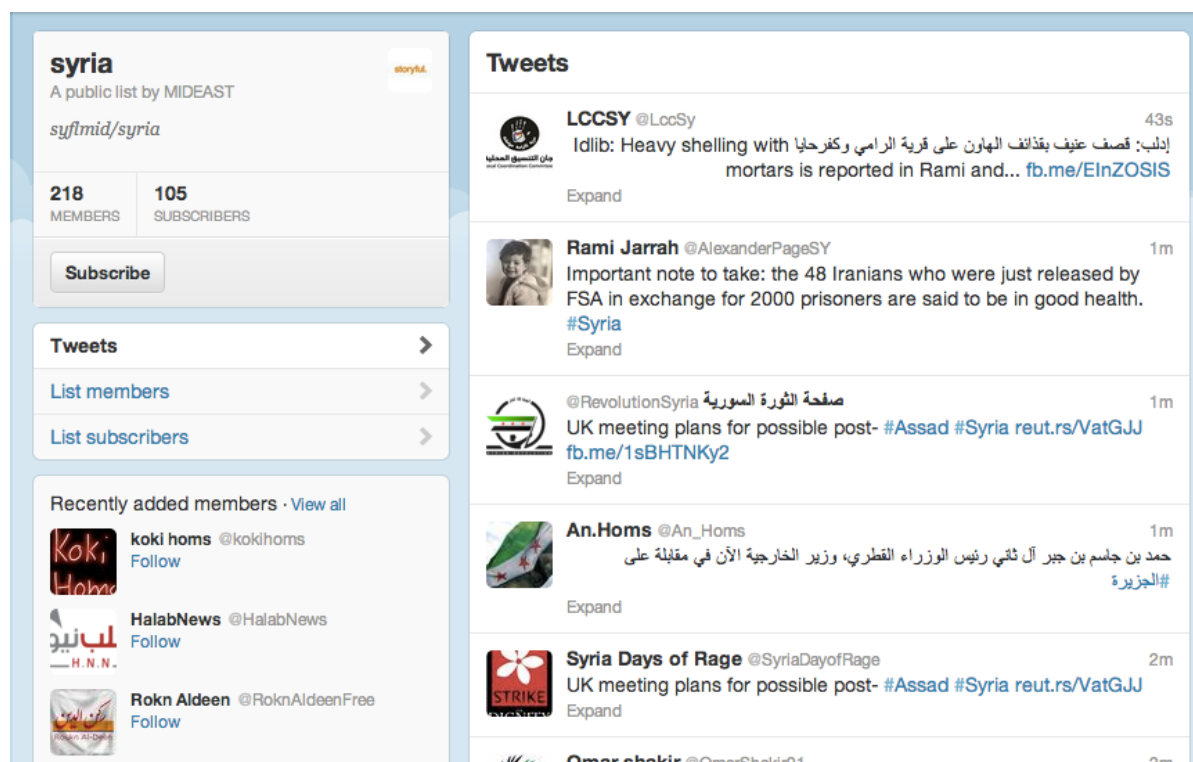
BY GARETH O'CONNOR

I love Twitter lists. You know, those handy groups of Twitter users hand-picked around a topic, geographical location or news story. I've been curating them since their introduction in 2009 to help filter content and manage community. And now here at Storyful, they've become the backbone of our live news systems. With the endless flow of information in our social media age, they work as the perfect live news filter, allowing

us to hone in on a location, a subject or an event and mute the cacophony of all the other conversations taking place simultaneously.

Let me give some examples. We have lists for every country and region in the world, and they come in use daily for monitoring news and events in specific areas. We curate them daily, adding new voices and removing those who may have left the region, to make sure they're constantly up to date.

Take our Syria list , (see left) a constantly curated list of 200 plus journalists, activists and commentators who offer continuous updates on what's happening on the ground in this war-torn country. It's a daily go-to for our journalists, offering us a live feed of the most recent reports and conversations, and let-



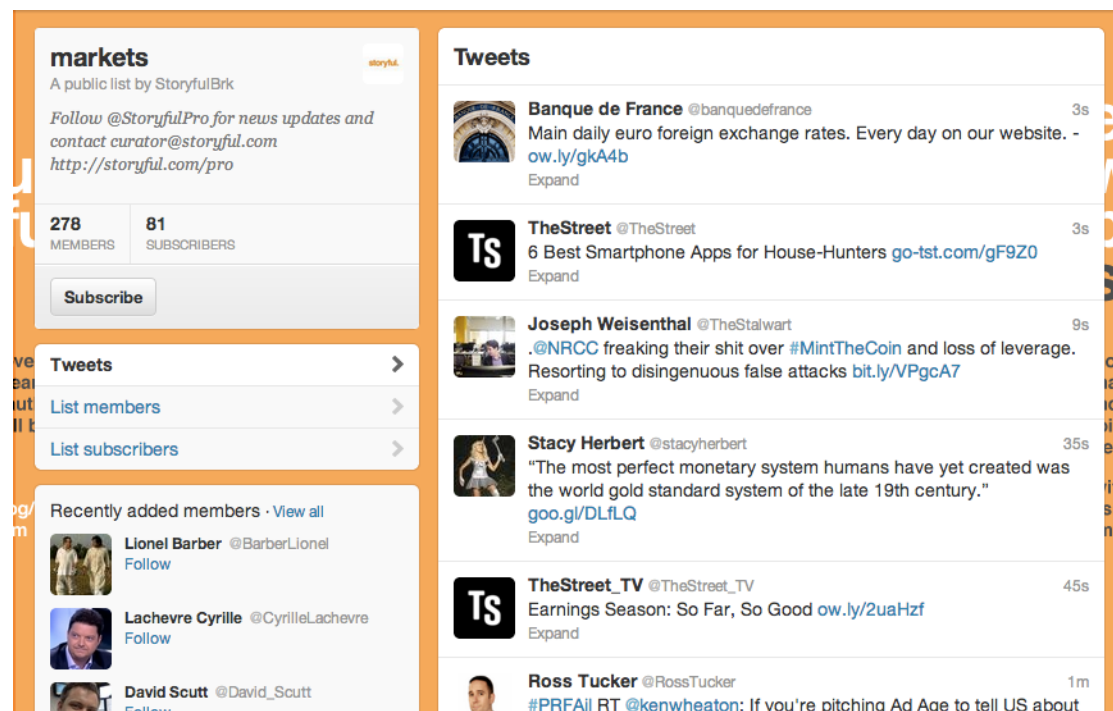
ting us know which stories on the day require closer attention. It's lists like these that are often the first alert we receive of events, with our carefully curated reliable sources in each area providing us with an invaluable early warning system when events bubble up.

It was through this list that we were first alerted to the the destruction of a helicopter near Maarat al-Numan, an alert which led us to pursue the story and come up with some compelling evidence of air strikes and put this Syrian town on the global news map [see Chapter 8 for more detail on this].

Another busy and useful list is our curated **markets list**, which offers a real-time glimpse into the world of money markets and economic data. It provides instant updates on market movements and has become an invaluable resource for our business desk. Stocks up or down? Fed rates move? New product for Apple that's moving the market? It all bubbles up through our list of over 270 news sources, which includes

the Twitter feeds of business journalists, financial institutions and government accounts.

While we have over 600 lists built at Storyful, we sometimes have to build new ones in a hurry. This can happen easily around a breaking news event, be it a weather disaster, a mass shooting, or a high profile court case. On the morning the Mladic trial



opened earlier this year, I did a quick trawl for journalists who were in the Hague for the court proceedings and put together a **micro-list** within minutes which let me see courtroom tweets at a glance and follow proceedings there as they happened.

For every news event – be it an **electioneering stump speech**, **a country in crisis** or a **devastating hurricane** - lists are an essential resource. On our live newswire @StoryfulPro, we alert followers to those relevant to stories as they break.

If that all smacks of solemnity, it's worth bearing in mind that Twitter lists are not just for news. Anybody can curate a list on any topic and many do so on **areas of interest**, **celebrities**, or simply **people that make them laugh**. It's just an easy way to parse information, and give focus to what you're taking in through social media in a way that might help your synapses from self combusting.

Many complain about the noise of social media, without realising that they have the tools to filter and manage their streams through lists. It's as easy as going to your profile page, creating a list, and then adding any account that you find that fits to that list.

Twitter also offers this **step-by-step guide** for the list novice. Just remember Twitter only allows you twenty lists per account and five hundred members per list. Sounds like plenty I bet, but as someone who lives in the Twitter stream on a constant – even alarming – basis, sometimes I wish it were more



<http://www.flickr.com/photos/bearpark/2706701983/>

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12

TWEET-DROPPING: THE ETHICS OF LIVE-TWEETING OVERHEARD CONVERSATIONS

BY CLAIRE WARDLE

Last week we wrote a story about #timandfreya, an argument between a young couple, played out on a train and live-tweeted by the comedienne Janey Godley (@janey-godley), who later storified the whole thing. It became somewhat of a viral sensation – the storify has had over 86,000 views. Our story started a number of discussions on twitter about the ethical issues this type of live-tweeting raises.

This incident reminded me of two similar examples from this year. The first involved a journalist live-tweeting a conversation overheard on a train. He mentioned that he thought the person sitting near him on the train was a local Councilwoman, and named her.

That was in January of this year, and an article by Poynter provoked debate about the ethics of his actions. Some argued the politician was fair game, having talked about politics on a train. Others said the journalist in question was wrong to live-tweet without giving her a heads-up. In the past, journalists would traditionally identify themselves as such in on-the-record conversations with politicians, unless anonymity was considered essential to uncovering some truth that was in the public interest. But even in those cases, the right of reply was usually afforded to the politician before the final piece was published. How can the same opportunity be offered to those publicly exposed in a social media context?

An incident sparking similar debates around the ethics of live-tweeting occurred earlier this year, when a married actor sat next to a model on a plane. She claimed he hit on her, and live-tweeted her perspective of their exchanges, even posting a picture of him to identify him clearly to the public. It turns out the actor wasn't very happy about the turn of events, and blasted back with a Facebook post claiming she had lied.

Neither party was a journalist. But in the age of social media, publishing is more universally available and everyone has the capacity for citizen journalism. So what ethical rules should apply?

As ever with social media, it's a grey area. We're working out the rules as we go. Do we feel best served by having a hypocrite unmasked and in a case of he said/she said, who do we believe? Does a person's public profile make it OK for their private life to be exposed? Is it more acceptable if no identifying details like twitpics or names are included? Is it always in the public interest to publicize a politician's conversations? Does it depend on the content of the conversation, and who makes the call?

I've written about the ethical dilemmas news organisations find themselves in when it comes to social media. Can a radio station read out comments from a public Facebook page about an issue without asking first? What happens when someone phones a radio station and says something inadvertently controversial and the resulting

Soundcloud clip goes viral? Should a news organisation use footage that has been filmed by an audience member, if they were clearly putting themselves in danger? Can a journalist use information they've sourced from a private Facebook page just because they've a personal connection?

One of the most significant problems here is balancing audience self-awareness with realistic expectations of needing information. Many people still leave their Facebook profiles wide open – type “my mobile number is” into Facebook search and click on ‘public results’. That always amazes me. And many people who actually have privacy settings on their personal page don't understand that when they post on a ‘save our local hospital’ page, that comment is public for all to see. They don't realise that it is – like a chatty politician, or a couple fighting on a train – a conversation held in a public place, audible to all those within virtual earshot. News organisations have a choice – to take advantage of that ignorance, or to play a role in educating their audience.

We're collectively working out the boundaries of what is ethical when using social media as a source. Though much of social media is organized around self publishing in a public manner, questions still arise about how to present and contextualise such material. Users of social media need to be cognizant of the drawbacks as well of the benefits of public posting, and readers need to be aware of the one-sided nature of much of what's reported through these mediums.

At Storyful we often use people's public comments in stories, but each time we discuss what is appropriate – context is everything. At these times, our journalists bring their experience from the established newsrooms they have worked in previously to bear, discussing how the same issues would have been treated in the mainstream media, and answering these questions case by case.

When I talked to a colleague about this post, he mentioned being guest lectured by the writer Maeve Binchy when at school and how she revealed she had learned how to lip-read so she could get inspiration from people in public settings, such as trains. Who knows how many real life stories became fictionalized in her work?

The #timandfreya story is an example of exactly this (although the volume of the conversation meant lip-reading was not a skill Jane Godley needed). It might seem harm-

less enough, and it has certainly entertained a large number of people. but it reveals some deeper issues about the power wielded by these smartphones we carry around.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Thank you for reading. We'd love to hear any comments or questions you might have about what we do. Please visit our the page on **our blog** where we link to this ebook (<http://blog.storyful.com/ebook>) to post your thoughts.

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