

NewsTrust

COMMUNICATIONS

2009 Report

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Prepared by:

Fabrice Florin
Executive Director
NewsTrust Communications

(415) 388-6688
fab@newstrust.net
<http://newstrust.net>

Summary

In 2009, NewsTrust developed a range of new services and partnerships to help people find good journalism online. We focused our efforts last year on growing our community, providing more value for our members and partners, as well as new business development.

This report outlines NewsTrust's key activities in 2009:

- New Services
- New Partners
- Larger Community
- Fundraising

Each of these activities is summarized below, and described in more depth in the following pages.

New Services

In 2009, NewsTrust developed a range of new services, along with a new version our website. This new site, which launched in September, is much easier to use and more appealing visually, with a simpler layout and improved user experience -- such as the *NewsTrust Toolbar*, which lets you post and review stories more quickly on external sites. Some of the many new services launched last year include *News Comparisons*, *Smart Feeds*, *News Literacy and Teacher Guides*, as well as community tools like *Facebook Connect*, *Member Widgets*, *Comments* and *Email Notifications*. New applications in development for 2010 include *My News* and *Groups*, as well as *My Stats* and *My Score*.

New Partners

In 2009, NewsTrust partnered with leading news providers and journalism schools, hosting dozens of *News Hunts* for good journalism on important public issues. Our partners included trusted media organizations like the *Washington Post*, the *Huffington Post*, *Link TV*, *Now on PBS* and *PolitiFact* -- as well as educational organizations like *Stanford University*, *Santa-Clara University* and the *University of Nevada*. These partnerships and *News Hunts* have significantly boosted our traffic, expanded our community and increased our productivity. We are discussing more partnerships with major new providers in the coming year.

Growing Community

The NewsTrust community grew steadily in 2009, thanks to our new services and partnerships. In the past twelve months, we served over 1.5 million visitors through our website and widgets, doubling in size to a 2009 average of 131,900 monthly unique visitors. We also nearly doubled our membership last year, with over 15,700 registered members and 6,800 reviewers. NewsTrust members include citizens, journalists, students and educators, who show unusually high levels of education and journalistic experience: about 74% of our members are college graduates, and about 22% have 5 years or more of news experience, according to a recent survey of our member profiles. We expect our community to grow even more in coming months, as we launch new services and sign up larger partners.

New Business

We're very grateful for the generous grants from the MacArthur Foundation and Ashoka, as well as private donations from NewsTrust board members and our community, which have allowed us to keep growing in 2009. Due to the economic recession, this has been a tough year for fundraising and generating revenue, particularly in the field of journalism, which is facing an unprecedented crisis of its own. To sustain our operations in coming years, we are exploring a range of options such as raising funds from new sources and developing strategic partnerships with compatible organizations. We also welcomed two new members on our board of directors: Howard Rheingold and David Cohn.

For more information, please contact Executive Director Fabrice Florin at fab@newstrust.net.

New Services

NewsTrust developed a range of new web services this year, including the release of a new website in September 2009.

New Site

Our new site is much easier to use and more appealing visually, with a simpler layout, and an improved user experience. Some of its many new features include:

- new toolbar, offering a much easier way to post and review stories on external sites
- new site layout, with more visual appeal, larger fonts and more colorful graphics
- streamlined home page with top stories grid and short listings by subject area
- news comparison tools and regular featured space on the home page
- member activity pages listing all your recent reviews and posts

New Services - 2009

We've launched a number of new services last year, such as:

- *News Comparisons* - see how different sources cover the same story
- *Smart Feeds* - top news links from Twitter, Digg and our trusted sources
- *Facebook Connect* - share your reviews with your friends
- *Member Widgets* - feature your reviews on your own site
- *Email Notifications* - find out when others review a story you reviewed
- *My Picks* - save stories you like to your personal picks list
- *Comments* - add your comments on story, topic and source pages
- *Member Awards* - monthly awards and recognition for your contributions
- *News Literacy Guides* - learn how to tell apart quality news from misinformation
- *Teacher Guides* - teach your students to recognize good and bad journalism

New Services - 2010

Other applications in development for the coming year include:

- *My News* - personalized news feeds that match your interests
- *Groups* - recommended news from friends, editors, political, local or interest groups
- *New Toolbar* - more story info, links and reviews, quick review form with quality tags
- *My Stats* - track your media diet and news literacy
- *My Score* - earn points for your contributions

With additional support from our backers, we hope to develop even more services in 2010. These new services are designed with the help of our community, and aim to make it easier for new visitors and experienced members alike to find and share quality journalism.

We expect that these new services and our enhanced user experience will generate more interest for NewsTrust in coming months, and attract more members, partners and backers to join forces with us.

New Partners

Besides new services, partnerships are a key driver for growing our community and overall traffic, as well as serving the public more effectively.

2009 Partnerships

Last year, NewsTrust partnered with 15 leading news providers and journalism schools, hosting dozens of *News Hunts* for good journalism on important public issues. Our partners included trusted media organizations like the *Washington Post*, *Huffington Post*, *Link TV*, *Now on PBS* and *PolitiFact* -- as well as educational organizations like *Stanford University*, *Santa-Clara University* and *University of Nevada*.

Here are some of the *News Hunts* we have organized with our partners last year:

- *Climate Change* - Link TV
- *Lobbying* - Washington Post's WhoRunsGov
- *Psychology* - Miller McCune Magazine
- *Bad Journalism* - Santa-Clara University
- *Health Care* - Huffington Post's Eyes & Ears
- *Afghanistan* - WNET's Worldfocus
- *Pakistan* - Huffington Post's Eyes & Ears
- *Education Reform* - NOW on PBS
- *Obama's First Hundred Days* - PolitiFact and U. of Nevada
- *Black Experience* - PBS, Tavis Smiley and U. of Santa-Clara
- *Education & Global Literacy* - Ashoka
- *Money* - Consumers Union and Stanford
- *War in Gaza* - Link TV, Yahoo News
- *Bush Legacy* - Washington Post

News Hunts

A *News Hunt* is a bit like a scavenger hunt for quality information. For each *News Hunt*, we invite our partner communities to join forces with us, and review hundreds of stories in weeklong searches for good journalism on topics like Afghanistan, Climate Change or Health Care. Participants typically include news professionals, content experts, concerned citizens, educators and students, all using the NewsTrust review tools for this common quest. At the end of each *News Hunt*, we collectively recommend the best news coverage on that topic, based on ratings from their community and ours.

For example, during our partnership with *Washington Post*, columnist Dan Froomkin invited his readers and our reviewers to find the best local and foreign news coverage on the *Bush Legacy* - allowing him to extend his own coverage of Washington correspondents with our help. Together, we reviewed hundreds of stories on that topic and identified some great good journalism from new voices outside the Beltway. We believe this type of 'smart crowdsourcing' can effectively support a journalist's work, and engage citizens as collaborators in public investigations of important civic issues.

Partnership Benefits

These partnerships have helped us boost our traffic, grow our community and increase our productivity. More importantly, our *News Hunts* generate substantial promotion for NewsTrust and its partners, making more people aware of our service, as well as strengthening its credibility through collaborations with trusted media and educational institutions.

Our partners typically promote our *News Hunts* to their communities -- and announce them prominently on their sites, blogs and email newsletters, at the start of the partnership. We also invite them to add our top-rated news widgets on their sites, where they can act as a scoreboard for our joint *News Hunts* -- and extend their coverage, as well as increase our visibility. Many of our partners also participate actively as reviewers, submitters and creators of quality journalism on the *News Hunt's* chosen topic. NewsTrust manages the projects and provides most of the legwork for these *News Hunts*.

Our *News Hunts* have helped hundreds of thousands of people become more discriminating news consumers last year -- empowering them to make more informed decisions as citizens. Our partnerships are an effective tool for developing a better public appreciation for quality news and opinion -- and supporting the core journalistic and civic values we stand for.

We are discussing more partnerships with major new providers later this year.

Growing Community

The NewsTrust community has grown steadily last year, thanks to our new services and partnerships.

Web Traffic

In the past twelve months, we served over 1.5 million unique visitors through our website and widgets, nearly doubling our numbers to a 2009 average of 131,900 unique visitors per month. Total pageviews also increased by 58%, averaging 429,000 monthly pageviews in 2009.

At the same time, our memberships grew by 85% in 2009, with over 15,700 registered members and 6,800 reviewers, generating an average of 2,300 story reviews per month. We also saw an increase in 'trusted members' last year, with 383 reviewers demonstrating high levels of activity, expertise, ratings and transparency, earning them a member level of 3 or more.

Here are our monthly traffic averages for 2009:

Pageviews	429,837
Visits	178,180
Unique Visitors	131,899
Members (cumulative)	15,393
Reviewers (cumulative)	6,353

These statistics are comparable to the news-related web traffic for many of our midsize partners, such as *Link TV*, *MillerMcCune* or *PolitiFact*. We expect our community to grow even more in coming months, as we launch new services and sign up larger partners.

NewsTrust Members

NewsTrust members include citizens, journalists, students and educators, who show unusually high levels of education and journalistic experience: about 74% of our members are college graduates, and about 22% have 5 years or more of news experience, according to a recent survey of our member profiles. About 85% of our members live in the United States, 70% are male, and 43% are 50 years or older (young adults 18-34 are the fastest rising demographic segment, growing from 24% last year to 30% of our member survey last year, through our recent partnerships with universities).

A majority of our current members tend to share liberal views, with 58% of our members identifying with political viewpoints on the left (down from 65% last year), 30% on the center (up from 25% last year) and 10% on the right (unchanged). Pew Research confirms that this political distribution is very typical of social networks, which typically attract many more liberals than conservatives. For the past couple years, we have actively tried to recruit more members on the right and center, and hope that upcoming partnerships with the Economist and the Wall Street Journal can help attract more moderates and republicans to our site.

Community Development

Throughout the year, NewsTrust organized regular community activities to help grow our social network: training calls for new members, monthly conference calls with current members, targeted emails for interest groups, surveys for feedback or user-centered design. Our community is organized in different groups, based on trust and experience: visitors to our site are encouraged to become members, then reviewers. The best reviewers are then invited to become hosts, and the most committed hosts can also become editors. Last year, we added a new group called newshounds for our most active members. At this time, we have about 244 hosts, 22 editors and 12 newshounds. At each step of the way, our members are entrusted with more privileges, based on merit and performance. As members gain trust in our network, their member levels rise and the more their reviews count in our overall ratings.

In 2009 we introduced new community awards to give members special recognition when they do well. And with the introduction of new applications like *My Score* next year, we hope to offer more community activities like contests or point-based rewards.

New Business

We're very grateful for generous multi-year grants from the MacArthur Foundation (\$500,000 in 2009) and Ashoka (\$37,500 in 2009), as well as private donations from NewsTrust members (\$5,980 in 2009), which allowed us to keep growing last year. Financials for NewsTrust Communications in 2009 will be published in spring 2010, as part of our filing requirements as a 501(c)(3) public benefit corporation.

Overall, this has been a tough year for fundraising, due to the economic recession -- particularly in the field of journalism, which is facing an unprecedented crisis of its own. To that end, we are exploring a range of options to sustain our service over time, including new grants and donations, new board members, cost-cutting and strategic partnerships.

New Grants

Several major funders have asked us for grant proposals to fund new projects in 2010, and we hope to raise more funds from our community to support next year's programs. As the economy starts to recover, we have renewed our fundraising discussions with other major grant-makers and philanthropic organizations -- several of which have shown serious interest in NewsTrust. We hope to announce additional grants in coming months.

New Donations

This fall, we started asking for member donations on our site and in email newsletters -- and have collected \$5,980 in contributions from private donors. We're very grateful to these early donors, and hope to get more support from our community in coming months. To make a donation to NewsTrust, go to newstrust.net/donate - or email us at donations@newstrust.net.

New Board Members

We also welcomed two new members on our board of directors: Howard Rheingold and David Cohn. We have worked closely with both Howard and David over the years, and their commitment to our cause, combined with their expertise in journalism, new media and education will be invaluable on our board. We would also like to thank departing board member Terry Gamble, whose term expired this year, for her many generous contributions to NewsTrust over the years.

Cost Cutting

To reduce our monthly expenses, we have scaled back our partnerships and web development for winter 2010, and will aim to maintain a minimum level of editorial and community service through the end of 2010, as we seek new funding to support our next steps.

Strategic Partner

We are actively seeking a close relationship with a larger strategic partner in the news and information space, with whom we could pool our resources and more effectively achieve our goals. The ideal strategic partner would have a compatible mission, a solid reputation in this field, an established community, a strong need for our services, as well as business development and financial resources to help us raise the funds we need in coming years. We'd be very grateful for any recommendations of likely partners we

For more information, please contact Executive Director Fabrice Florin at fab@newstrust.net.

ABOUT NEWSTRUST

NewsTrust helps people find good journalism online, so they can make more informed decisions as citizens.

We're nonprofit, nonpartisan, and committed to news literacy and civic engagement. Our social news network features a daily feed of quality news and opinions from mainstream and independent sources, based on ratings from our reviewers. Our web review tools enable the public to evaluate accuracy, fairness, context and other core journalistic principles -- and help people become more discriminating news consumers in the process. We also rate our reviewers based on performance, to increase the reliability of our reviews and help them grow their own news literacy. To find out more, check our site: <http://newstrust.net/>

NewsTrust.net has attracted a growing community of journalists, educators and citizens, who share a passion for quality news and information, serving over 1.2 million visitors in the last year. Our media partners include *The Washington Post*, *PBS*, the *Huffington Post* and *PolitiFact* -- and our educational partners include Stanford University, Stony Brook and the University of Nevada, to name but a few.

NewsTrust's Executive Director is Fabrice Florin, a former journalist and a digital media pioneer at Apple and Macromedia. Our team includes a select group of award-winning journalists, technologists and community organizers -- with advisors such as Dan Gillmor, Craig Newmark, Howard Rheingold and other media innovators from organizations like the Associated Press, Google and Stanford University.

Founded in 2005 and based in Mill Valley, California, NewsTrust nonprofit project funded through grants and private donations. The MacArthur Foundation is our main funder and has awarded two multi-year grants to support NewsTrust's online credibility service. Other funding sources include Ashoka, Ayrshire Foundation, Mitch Kapor Foundation, Sunlight Foundation and Tides Foundation, as well as Google and private donors such as Craig Newmark (Craigslist) and Doug Carlston (Public Radio International).

NewsTrust Communications was formed in June 2008 as a public benefit corporation and received its a 501 (c) (3) tax-exempt status from the IRS in December 2008. Though we are nonprofit, we aim to run a sustainable business, and plan to generate revenue from memberships, sponsorships, licensing and partner services to support this project in coming years.

For more information about NewsTrust, view our About page: <http://newstrust.net/about>

For a visual overview of NewsTrust, view our PDF presentation at this URL: <http://media.newstrust.net/slides/NewsTrustSlides.pdf>

HOW IS NEWSTRUST DIFFERENT FROM OTHER SOCIAL NEWS SITES?

Independent research from the University of Michigan suggests that our collaborative evaluation system is more effective for evaluating quality information than first-generation social news sites like Digg.

Here are some key differences between our services:

- we rate journalistic quality, not just popularity
- we track ratings for each publication in our source reputation database
- we feature stories from our most trusted sources in our daily listings
- citizens using our tools can assess news quality as well as professionals
- our multiple-rating evaluations are more reliable than single ratings

To discourage gaming, we offer these preventive measures:

- reviewers are identified by their real names
- we rate our reviewers based on the quality of their work
- our reviewers' ratings are weighted based on their own member level
- member levels are based on activity, experience, ratings and transparency

OUR TEAM

The NewsTrust team includes experienced media executives, journalists and engineers, who bring extensive track records in content and technology development.

EXECUTIVES

- Fabrice Florin - Executive Director
- David Fox - Technology Director

BOARD MEMBERS

- David Cohn - Spot.us
- Fabrice Florin - Executive Director
- Henry Perry - GenSpring
- Howard Rheingold - Stanford
- Kim Spencer - Link TV

STAFF (partial)

- Kaizar Campwala - Associate Editor
- Derek Hawkins - Assistant Editor
- Subramanya Sastry - Web Engineer

ADVISORS (partial)

- Doug Carlston - Public Radio International
- Terry Gamble - Ayrshire Foundation
- Kelly Garrett - University of Ohio
- Dan Gillmor - Arizona State University
- Craig Newmark - Craigslist

Press Quotes

Here's what journalists are saying about NewsTrust:

News literacy training for the public

"Experimental sites like newstrust.net hope to create ratings systems from authorities who evaluate news articles on a range of criteria, and are themselves rated by the raters. (...) Fabrice Florin, the founder of News Trust, said sites like his would be crucial to flagging inaccuracy ... The only long-term hope, he said, was news literacy training for the public, one of New Trust's missions."

New York Times - by Noam Cohen

Upholding the sturdy old virtues

"One of interesting things about the NewsTrust initiative is that it has both emergent and conservative ideas built into it. The news judgment of newsroom priests is dethroned. The people formerly known as the audience take over the 'gate,' as it were. But the virtues upheld--accuracy, fairness, evidence, proportion, decency, respect for our intelligence--are the old sturdy ones."

PressThink - Jay Rosen

An intriguing experiment

"At NewsTrust, people post links to stories they recommend and then fill out a form to evaluate the story's reliability. These ratings don't just apply to a single story, but are assigned to the news organization (or individual) so that they create a reputation over time."

San Jose Mercury News - Chris O'Brien

From the Daily Me to the Daily We

"If the 'wisdom of the crowds' is to be brought to bear on the news, NewsTrust may point the way. ... Not only can users submit stories and rate them on a variety of criteria, such as importance, sourcing, and fairness, but there are also methods of rating the reliability of news organizations, and even of fellow users."

The Guardian - Dan Kennedy

Citizens keep watch on the quality of journalism

"Rating with multiple criteria has a curious effect: at first, you're encouraged to read the article more carefully. And when it's time to rate the article, you feel an irresistible need to take a second look at certain sections, to make sure that your verdict will be correct. This invites a more attentive and critical review, making us better readers. "

Le Monde - Francis Pisani

A fascinating experiment

"NewsTrust.net is one of those eye-opening experiments with social networking that leaves an old newspaper guy shaking his head in awe... To fully appreciate NewsTrust you need to knock around the site. Simply put, this entry into crowd sourcing tries to measure quality of journalism and not the sheer popularity of stories. ... Educationally, the sites offers some exciting possibilities."

Walter Cronkite School of Journalism - Tim McGuire

Community Testimonials

Here's what our supporters are saying about NewsTrust:

"I believe strongly in NewsTrust because citizen involvement in returning public trust to journalism is so important to the future of democracy."

Howard Rheingold - Stanford University

"The guys from NewsTrust are building something new, tools that help people find trustworthy news. Their technology allows everyone to work together to rate and filter the news, and figure out what's fair and factual. ... I believe in what these guys are doing, and have contributed my time and money."

Craig Newmark - Craigslist

"The potential of this approach is terrific: community involvement in understanding how well journalists -- including bloggers -- do at their jobs (whether it's a professional or amateur activity or something in between). Clearly, this is an early iteration. But the promise is clear. Join up and help out."

Dan Gillmor – Arizona State University

"NewsTrust is one of the most useful ideas I've seen in a long time. The rating system is on-target and relevant, which makes it easy to find the stories that I'm interested in. And I always find pieces that I would have missed on other sites. Great idea, great implementation."

John Taylor - Moraga, CA

"I've become a much more discerning news reader after having rated articles on the NewsTrust site. As I read news articles elsewhere, I find myself noting how many and what sources are used and what kind of language is employed."

Peggy Kruse - Founding Member - Florissant, MO

"NewsTrust lets me make my own personal contribution to the Fourth Estate, not by writing more news but by helping to find the gems already out there, drowning in a sea of information. None of us has the time to consume more than a fraction of 'all the news that is news.' But with NewsTrust we can help ourselves and each other to find good journalism."

Mike LaBonte - Haverhill, MA

"NewsTrust is an excellent tool for finding reliable sources and sharpening my own analytical skills. The review process helps me evaluate content and quality more effectively, see beyond my own opinions, and become better informed about vital issues."

Marsha Iverson - Seattle, WA

"I love NewsTrust for its accessibility, diversity and its grass-root nature. I get to evaluate stories good and bad, and then hear what people with different background and experience think of the same stories. We may vehemently disagree with each other, but I learn a lot from what others think."

Lewyn Li - Boston, MA