



Report to Stakeholders

May- August, 2010



ProPublica Reports, May-August 2010

Second in a series of periodic reports to our stakeholders about progress at ProPublica. Our first report, covering the first four months of 2010, is available [here](#) and at ProPublica.org.

ProPublica is an independent, non-profit newsroom that produces investigative journalism in the public interest. ProPublica is a new kind of institution: staffed with top talent but unencumbered by print legacy costs. Our work focuses exclusively on truly important stories, stories with “moral force.” We do this by producing journalism that shines a light on exploitation of the weak by the strong and on the failures of those with power to vindicate the trust placed in them. With 32 full-time reporters and editors, ProPublica has the largest investigative news staff in the nation. In April of this year, it became the first online news organization to be honored with a Pulitzer Prize.

The second four months of 2010 saw ProPublica publishing a wide range of important stories, as well as moving ahead on a number of critical initiatives:

- **Major Stories.** We published 33 major stories during this period, with 16 publishing partners. New partners ranged across newspapers, radio, television, online and leading trade publications, and included the Bradenton [Florida] Herald, the National Law Journal, Need to Know on PBS, NPR News, the Sarasota Herald-Tribune, and Yahoo! News, while continuing partners included CBS News, Frontline on PBS, the Huffington Post, the Los Angeles Times, Marketplace on public radio, the New Orleans Times-Picayune, Planet Money on NPR, USA Today and the Washington Post. We select publishing partners for each story with an eye toward maximizing the story’s impact.

The stories were diverse as well, from our early and aggressive coverage of [how the corporate culture at BP has contributed to the company’s poor safety record](#) to the [legal fallout from the torture of prisoners at Guantanamo](#)--

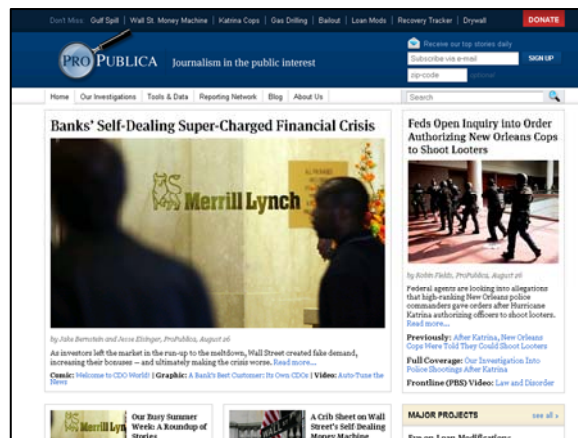


Our reporting on the Gulf Oil Spill ranged from the technical problems on the rig to how BP’s corporate culture contributed to the explosion.

which was the subject of a New York Times lead editorial. ProPublica reporting has also uncovered the [military's problems in addressing traumatic brain injuries](#) incurred in Afghanistan and Iraq, [self-dealing and faked demand for securities by the nation's investment banks](#) ahead of the financial crisis, the true scope of Gulf Coast [homeowners' losses from defective Chinese drywall](#), problems in a federal database intended to weed out [dangerous health care providers](#), and [marketing scams by some for-profit colleges](#).

- **Building our publishing platform.**

One of our key goals in 2010 and 2011 is to build a publishing platform that enables ProPublica not only to continue to partner with leading news organizations which can contribute to the impact of our stories—but also to have the capacity to publish with impact on our own. That requires building an audience. We're making significant strides in this direction. Each major ProPublica story is now sent directly to more than 65,000 users who have asked us to alert them via email, Facebook, Twitter or on an iPhone or iPad app. During this four-month period alone, subscribers to our daily email grew by 24% to more than 31,000, the number of our Twitter followers increased by 52% to more than 12,000, our Facebook fan count rose 60% to more than 8500, and downloading of our apps quadrupled, to more than 12,000, as our iPad app launched in July.



ProPublica's redesigned website launched at the end of June.

Our growing readership, moreover, is an impressive and influential group. Nearly 3400 of them completed a survey in June, permitting us to describe them with some specificity. They're web-centric, with 60% saying the Internet is their primary source of news (vs. only 18.5% for newspapers). One in 10 of our readers is a fellow journalist; one in 15 works in government. More than 82 percent have graduated from college.

We redesigned and enhanced our website in late June, to better spotlight our biggest stories, better display our tools, data and blog posts, and to put more of our work in clearer context.

The result of all of this activity was that August, often considered a slow month for publishing, was our second-biggest web traffic month ever (following April 2010, when one of our reporters received that Pulitzer Prize). Our site garnered more than one million page views by more than 350,000 unique visitors in August. This represented an increase of 62% in page views and 72% in unique visitors over August 2009, which actually also featured strong traffic from the story that ultimately won the Pulitzer.

- **Impact.** Most important, our journalism continues to have impact:

- **“[Law and Disorder](#)”:**

ProPublica reporter AC Thompson has led the way on reporting about vigilante and police violence in post-Katrina New Orleans since late 2008. This work was graphically brought home in a full episode of PBS Frontline in August. At this writing, 16 New Orleans police officers have been indicted, five have pleaded guilty and the new mayor has asked for federal oversight of his city’s force. One of the perpetrators of vigilante violence in New Orleans’s Algiers Point section, identified by Thompson’s reporting, is also under federal indictment.



Reporter AC Thompson guided viewers through his investigation of the NOPD on Frontline.

- **“[Buried Secrets](#)”:** Natural gas drilling coverage by reporter Abrahm Lustgarten, regarding the dangers of hydraulic fracturing of shale in search of natural gas and the threat it poses to the nation’s water, continues to pace the national debate. An industry email warning of new environmental threats in oil fields fell into our hands this Spring. It concluded “*This is the last thing we need to be hitting the headlines via ProPublica or otherwise.*” The Senate majority leader included the mandatory disclosure of “fracking” chemicals in his draft energy bill this summer.

- [“Eye on Loan Modifications”](#): The federal home loan modification program has been the focus of reporting by our Paul Kiel. Kiel’s work has focused national attention on this issue, and also continues to yield individual loan modifications for homeowners our reporting has spotlighted, as banks seek to avoid further bad publicity in these newly high-profile cases.



California homeowner Suzanna Wertheim received a modification after we profiled her.

- ProPublica was also first to call attention to the dangers of certain chemical dispersants deployed to fight the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, resulting in EPA orders limiting the use of those dispersants.
- A 2009 series of articles published in partnership with the Chicago Tribune led this May to a bill signed by Illinois Governor Pat Quinn tightening standards of informed consent in the administration of psychotropic drugs in Illinois nursing homes.
- **Awards.** Most press awards are bestowed in the Spring, and ProPublica certainly received [its fair share of such accolades](#). More recent honors for ProPublica have included the Knight-Batten Awards for Innovations in Journalism special distinction award for ProPublica’s distributed reporting, the Molly Ivins National Journalism Prize to reporter AC Thompson, the Richard Clurman Award for mentoring young journalists to editor-in-chief Paul Steiger, the Stokes Award for Best Energy Writing from National Press Foundation to reporters Abrahm Lustgarten and Joaquin Sapien, and the Inman News Innovator Award for most innovative media site for our Eye on Loan Modifications feature.
- **New staff.** The build-out of our staff is largely complete, but we did add Kim Barker as a reporter in June. Barker recently finished her term as the Edward R. Murrow Press Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York, where she

studied, wrote and lectured on Pakistan and Afghanistan and U.S. policy. She was the South Asia bureau chief for the Chicago Tribune from 2004 to 2009, based in New Delhi and Islamabad.

Also joining our team, in July, is Debby Goldberg, vice president/development. Debby comes to ProPublica from the Center for American Progress, where she served as senior vice president for development, after earlier work at Human Rights Watch and Brooklyn College. [Full bios of all of our key staff](#) can be found on our web site.

- **Funding.** Building long-term sustainability remains a key priority. Our efforts to diversify our funding are supported by a three-year grant from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. New support during this period came from a range of leading funders, including the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Pew Charitable Trusts, the Atlantic Philanthropies, the Ford Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Open Society Institute and the Skoll Global Threats Fund. Continuing funders include the Sandler Foundation, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

In addition, online gifts, ranging from \$5 to \$500, continued ahead of even the strong pace set in the first months of 2010. Six times as many such donors gave more than five times as much money in the first eight months of 2010 as in the final eight and a half months of 2009 (when online donations were first accepted). Our average online gift is \$74. These unsolicited donations tend to increase in response to publication of our largest and most important stories.