

Activist, Unicorn or Content Curator? What do today's journalists need to be?

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Julia Ziemer shares notes from the [International Journalism Festival 2015 #IJF15](#), a free five-day festival in Perugia, Italy where journalists and media professionals from around the world debate and discuss current issues affecting journalism.

In his keynote speech at the International Journalism Festival 2015, [Jeff Jarvis](#) professor at J-School, City University NYC, described his new 'Social Journalism' course where students are taught to explore how they might best 'serve' their community. For Jarvis, journalists need to be 'service providers' rather than just 'content providers' and his course aims to teach students to become 'community activists and organisers' as well as journalists when they graduate. Jarvis was one of over 500 speakers at the festival where a huge range of new professionals from experienced editors to students came together in the Umbrian town for discussions and workshops.



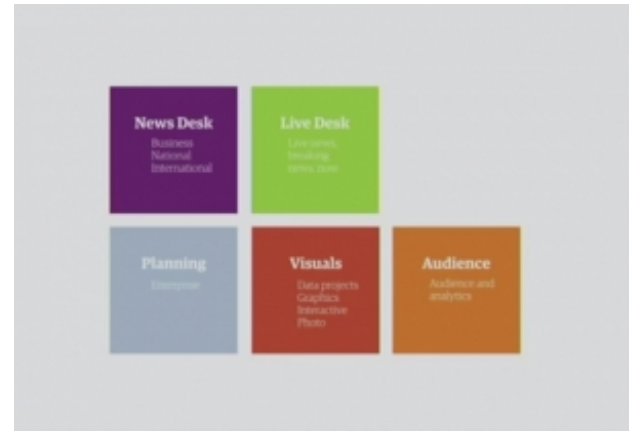
What Now?

The idea of the journalist taking on an 'activist' role, cropped up frequently with US academic Dan Gillmor calling his keynote, '[Why Journalists should be activists](#)'. There were examples of this in practice from established brands like the Guardian with its #keepitintheground campaign and smaller enterprises like '[Positive News](#)'. Contributors Danielle Batist and Seán Dagan Wood presented their '[Constructive Journalism Project](#)', a campaign to encourage journalists to report stories in a way that highlights the potential solutions rather than just the problems. They describe the onus on the journalist to go one step further from the traditional five Ws (Who, What, Why, When, How) adding the extra question: What now?

Digital Disruption and the two-way conversation

And 'What Now?' was the question posed by many speakers who sought to explain and predict how the role of journalists are changing in the face of seismic shifts in their terrain. Alongside the more traditional 'journalist' and 'editor' roles, panelists had job-titles like 'digital innovation editor', 'social media editor' and the intriguing 'new media explorer'. In the emerging world of User Generated Content, Online Comment Boards and Big Data, the role of the journalist inevitably shifts and fragments- should they be content curators, discussion moderators, coders or community activists?

The old 'legacy media' model of one-way dialogue between a journalist and their audience was widely accepted as obsolete. Aron Pilhofer in [his keynote](#) outlined the new structure he had implemented in the Guardian newsroom where the traditional newsdesk team worked work closely with 'planning', 'live' 'visuals and 'audience'. Gone are the days when a journalist could come to him with a fully-fledged story and ask him just to 'slice off a piece of the internet' for them at the end. For young budding journalists, straddling the skills divide of traditional writing skills and data manipulation could be the ticket to success. In a session called '[The unicorns of the newsroom](#)', editors from the Wall Street Journal and BBC talked about their 'unicorns': highly valuable individuals who combine great writing skills with an ability to code and interpret data.



As the festival came to a close, I was left with the sense of how it is both an exciting and daunting time to be a journalist. With the ongoing shifts in platforms and news consumption, collaboration and being open to new ways of working are as important as generating a good story. Staying one step ahead of the curve could be useful too which is why coming along to festivals to like IFJ is probably a good idea.

@Julezzee

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