

Making money online: crowdfunding

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American new media journalism guru [David Cohn](#) is launching a new online news service call [Spot.us](#) that he hopes will make money out of what I call [Networked Journalism](#).



The idea is simple but will it work? Here's the deal:

"Spot Us" is a nonprofit website that allows an individual or group to take control of news in their community by sharing the cost (crowdfunding) to commission freelance journalists to write important, or uncovered news stories.

And this is how it will work:

1. An individual or journalist creates a pitch that outlines an untold story in a local community.
2. Members of your community vote, with their money, on what stories are most important to them.
3. A journalist researches the facts and puts together an article. Editors provide check-and-balance on the story.
4. Spot.us publishes the story in its news feeds and works with local media outlets to have the articles published more widely.

Sounds neat (as I believe they say in America). It is certainly an attempt to answer one question that I keep getting asked as I tour my [book](#), which is How Will You Fund Networked Journalism?

In a sense what Spot.US is doing is a version of the traditional news organisation. Local newspapers, for example, should be covering stories that their readers want covering. David Cohn is simply changing the delivery mechanism. But that's important when the current delivery mechanism isn't working. Now here's the "Buts" or the "Interesting Questions This Raises":

- Will it support anything but investigative journalism? That would be good in itself but what about all the other stuff? I am suspicious of projects like ProPublica which separate out investigative journalism from the rest – all journalism needs investment. 💎
- Will people only get together to fund stuff that they already think they know the answer to? So everyone will commission articles to expose the local chemical plant's safety record – but will they commission an article arguing that a chemical plant should be built? 💎
- Will such an ad hoc system be able to generate the traffic, both in terms of business but also in terms of a relationship where people can be bothered to go through the effort of imagination and time to commission something? It seems to me quite a bit leap to expect the public to do what even traditional journalists have struggled to do: come up with story ideas. So I suspect it will end up being the journalists on the site who originate 90% of the ideas. But that might shift over time. 💎
- what is the community? Spot.US doesn't *have* to define it but I am not sure if the users will be able to either 💎
- Will people pay on an ad hoc basis? people like to contribute (when it's free) to story aggregation through DIGG etc but will they sign up for micro-payments? I hope so but I doubt it. 💎
- As for all the questions about balance, impartiality etc? Well, those things don't worry me. Spot.us will

succeed if it is trustworthy, relevant and useful. ♦

On a more theoretical note. I have been thinking a lot recently about the idea of 'relevance'. I think it is more important to the future of journalism than truth, trust, or quality. Somehow, journalism has to become more proximate to people's lives. It has to be a process and a service rather than a product. I think Spot.us could be an interesting way of gaining this kind of relevance.

I wish David and [Spot.US](#) well.

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