

# MOBILE JOURNALISM ENABLES NEWSPAPERS TO PROVIDE REAL-TIME COVERAGE ONLINE

I am a mojo. I stream live news video to the web from my mobile phone.

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**T**he Internet has helped create many new journalism jobs and the mojo, a contraction of mobile journalist, is the latest and one of the most powerful in helping newspapers looking for new ways to drive audiences to their web sites. Breaking news drives that traffic, and multi-media is the most powerful attraction because it is often exclusive and compelling, and audiences love it.

The mojo concept, science fiction a few years ago, is now a daily reality for innovative newspapers. I have covered live press conferences in Australia, interviewed people in the wilds of Borneo, and enhanced print features with video segments.

A news conference I covered in Australia illustrates how the process works. It was three days before the grand final of the Australian Football League. The news conference was stage-managed: a star player made a brief appearance and then retreated. A media manager tried to ensure that the player gave no individual interviews.

The media crowd made it difficult to get close to Darren Milburn, the star player. So I was forced to hold my Nokia mobile phone in outstretched arms above the media pack. Even a 130 gram phone starts to feel heavy after several minutes.

But the video went back live to the web site of the *Geelong Advertiser* and I sent back half a dozen good pieces of video during the 20-minute news conference. Each arrived within seconds of being sent and, best of all, I managed surreptitiously to get the only individual interview with Milburn. He seemed amused at being interviewed by someone with a tiny mobile phone, and the media manager remained blissfully unaware of the interview.

The beauty of the mojo concept lies in its simplicity. Reporters are already familiar with



mobile phones. With minimal training they can record images and sound, and send content to an editor, who can put multi-media breaking news onto a newspaper's web site within minutes. Add a Bluetooth keyboard and the mobile phone becomes a laptop.

A Nokia keyboard sells for about US\$ 100 (euro 77). High-end Nokia phones such as the N95 and N96 also have a high-quality audio recorder. Reporters can record radio interviews and send them to the newspaper's web site.

Think of the mojo as a Swiss army knife. If you have to fend for yourself in the news

jungle, better to have this tool rather than nothing.

The mojo gives newspapers a way to compete with television and radio as the quality of phone cameras improves and Nokia say they will produce phones capable of high definition television in a couple more years.

The technical process is simple: Register the mobile phone number with one of the half dozen web-based companies that offer free software. Within seconds you receive a text message with a web link. Select the link and the software loads onto the phone. After that, it takes one button to open the video software or audio recorder on the phone and one more to begin and end filming or recording.

The main providers of video streaming today include Qik, Shozu and Kyte in the United States, Mogulus in Canada, Bambuser in Sweden and Flixwagon in Israel.

Video shot on the phone's camera streams almost live to the software company's site. A newspaper can copy each piece of video's embed code into its web site. A faster option, which would involve negotiations between the newspaper and the software company, would be to stream video directly from the camera to the newspaper's web site. Newspapers considering this option need to work with individual software companies.

Most of the software currently on the market works only on cell phones that use

**THE BASIC MOJO KIT:**  
 POWERMONKEY EXPLORER, NOKIA N95 MOBILE, NOKIA KEYBOARD, SONY MIC AND TRIPOD.



**LAURA RUANE** OF THE GEELONG ADVERTISER SENDS IN A REPORT.

the Symbian operating system, such as Nokia and Sony Ericsson, and a handful of handsets with Windows Mobile. As of October 2008, Symbian runs about 60 per cent of the world's 3.3 billion mobile phones.

In the context of journalism, the word "mojo" appears to have been coined in 2005 by staff at Gannett newspapers in the United States. It was the codename for a project at *The News-Press* in Fort Myers in Florida, where reporters were gathering and distributing news in new ways. Kate Marymont, then executive editor for *The News-Press*, said the mojo experiment was designed to create neighborhood-focused areas within the newspaper's website, [www.news-press.com](http://www.news-press.com), and to deliver breaking news throughout each day.

"This experiment sprang from two related beliefs," Marymont said. "One, deep ultra-local neighborhood web sites can be lively gathering places of people online. Two, we must have the help of residents to build these sites, but they won't know how to contribute unless we help them." Some Fort Myers mojos spent time each day

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LOUISE MARSLAND, EDITOR

recruiting and training contributors from the audience.

The major new development since those innovations at *The News-Press* has been the arrival of software that allows reporters to stream live video and audio from a mobile phone to a newspaper's web site.

The cost of video or audio is based on the data transmitted, not the amount of time the phone is online and newspapers need to consider how to pay for data charges because video generates large files. The best option is an unlimited monthly data package but these are not available in every country.

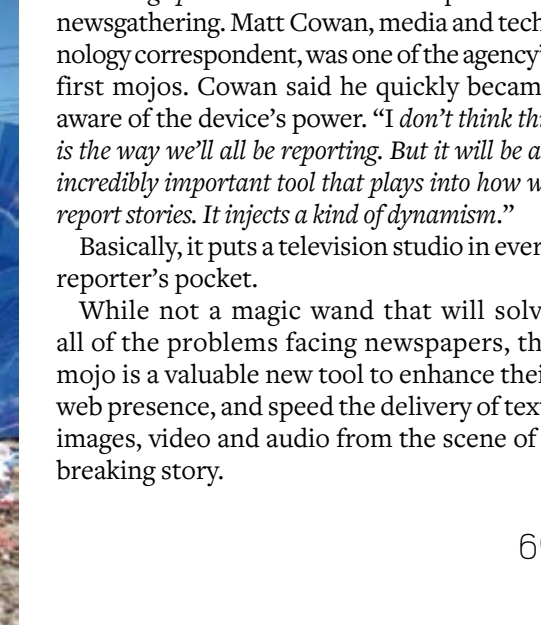
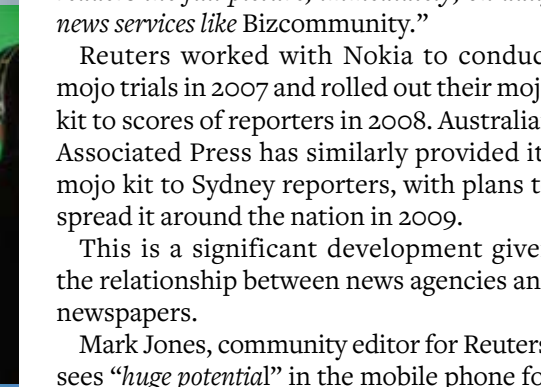
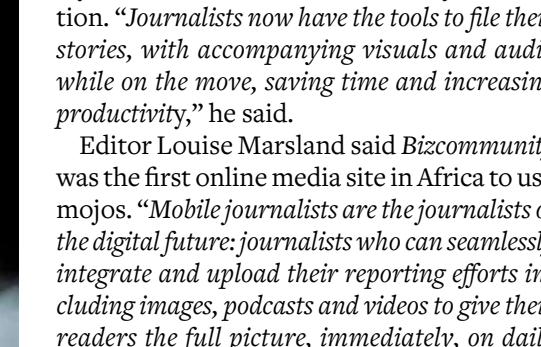
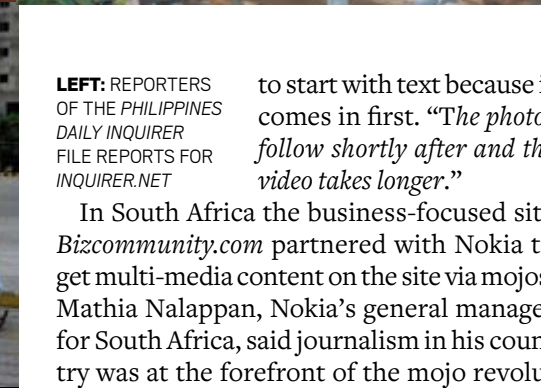
Mojos are springing up at newspapers around the world.

Reporters at *The Star* in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, are using their mobile phones to break news for *The Star Online*. They send single paragraphs by SMS, usually four or five in total. The site's new media desk cobbles them into a news story, picking the most relevant paragraph for an SMS news alert. When reporters return to the office they update the breaking story. Then they file a complete print story.

The *Star* is also building a mobile team, literally, said new media editor Aryaduray Asohan, for launch in the first quarter of 2009. "We're working with our radio subsidiaries. The idea is to have a fully equipped SUV or similar vehicle that would allow reporters to cover stories, shoot videos and do video interviews, edit and do the post-production work, all on the go. They would then upload their complete output to *The Star Online* remotely."

Reporters at *Inquirer.net*, the online site of the *Philippines Daily Inquirer* in Manila, have been filing stories remotely via their Nokia mobiles since 2007. The site's editor-in-chief, JV Rufino, said reporters used free wi-fi facilities at cafes to file video if they cannot get a wireless connection.

Reporters supply an average of five stories a day. "Sometimes it's three or four if they are doing longer stories; more if they are doing shorter stories. We like to do one [major] video story a day, which is seven a week." Breaking news tends



LEFT: REPORTERS OF THE PHILIPPINES DAILY INQUIRER FILE REPORTS FOR INQUIRER.NET

to start with text because it comes in first. "The photos follow shortly after and the video takes longer."

In South Africa the business-focused site *Bizcommunity.com* partnered with Nokia to get multi-media content on the site via mojos. Mathia Nalappan, Nokia's general manager for South Africa, said journalism in his country was at the forefront of the mojo revolution. "Journalists now have the tools to file their stories, with accompanying visuals and audio while on the move, saving time and increasing productivity," he said.

Editor Louise Marsland said *Bizcommunity* was the first online media site in Africa to use mojos. "Mobile journalists are the journalists of the digital future: journalists who can seamlessly integrate and upload their reporting efforts including images, podcasts and videos to give their readers the full picture, immediately, on daily news services like *Bizcommunity*."

Reuters worked with Nokia to conduct mojo trials in 2007 and rolled out their mojo kit to scores of reporters in 2008. Australian Associated Press has similarly provided its mojo kit to Sydney reporters, with plans to spread it around the nation in 2009.

This is a significant development given the relationship between news agencies and newspapers.

Mark Jones, community editor for Reuters, sees "huge potential" in the mobile phone for newsgathering. Matt Cowan, media and technology correspondent, was one of the agency's first mojos. Cowan said he quickly became aware of the device's power. "I don't think this is the way we'll all be reporting. But it will be an incredibly important tool that plays into how we report stories. It injects a kind of dynamism."

Basically, it puts a television studio in every reporter's pocket.

While not a magic wand that will solve all of the problems facing newspapers, the mojo is a valuable new tool to enhance their web presence, and speed the delivery of text, images, video and audio from the scene of a breaking story.