

A social media toolkit for the journalism classroom

My number one tool indisputably must be Twitter. Twitter allows you to tweet or make short 140 character updates (tweets) of your life and your learning. Instead of being an arbitrary tool, you can use it to focus your students' attention in the classroom by asking them to tweet lectures, ask or respond to questions and share resources.

It's quite amazing how trying to dot down presenter's notes forces me to think about what they are saying in summary mode and making sense in the process. You can use it as a notice board for assignments, test dates and resource sharing.

The greatest advantage of using this tool, however, is that it provides cutting edge access to news, as *The Times* editor Ray Hartley (@hartley on twitter) pointed out: "The default switch has been set to online."

Twitter is now a must-have journalist earpiece, networking and primary news breaking tool. A novel idea is to create an informal tweetpaper (twitter newspaper) from your favourite twits' tweets (people that use twitter effectively in your field of interest) or student tweets, using a secondary twitter tool like <http://paper.li/>

For my detailed step by step twitter tutorial, see <http://bit.ly/twitter2teach>.



SOCIAL MEDIA IS FAST BECOMING THE DEFAULT INTERNET MODE OF INTERACTION, COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION SAYS MAGGIE VERSTER. AS TEACHERS OF GOOD JOURNALISM HABITS WE NEED TO START MODELLING THE EDUCATIONAL AND RESPONSIBLE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA TOOLS IN OUR CLASSROOMS. THIS POSES A PROBLEM: WHERE DO YOU START? WHICH TOOLS DO YOU CHOOSE? HOW TO BECOME FAMILIAR WITH THE TOOLS IN ORDER TO USE THEM IN A PEDAGOGICALLY INNOVATIVE WAY? TO GET YOU STARTED, HERE IS A BASIC TOOLKIT FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS OF JOURNALISM.



Wordle (www.wordle.net) is a visual tool that brings out important elements of pieces of text. This means that you can paste your article into this tool and it will create a word cloud of all the important words or ideas that are most prominent. It calculates the frequency of words in a piece of text and enlarges the words with the highest count. You can even measure student involvement when pasting discussion threads or chats. Try "wordling" your next article as a final check to see if your intended topic has taken its rightful place in the script.



Social bookmarking can be seen as the digital library of any journalist social media toolkit. You can use it to save and share all your most valuable resource links. Instead of saving your favourite web pages inside your computer browser, you can save them into an online repository where they can be accessed from any computer anywhere, as well as by your network of co-learners, co-workers or students.

By using online social bookmarking tools like Delicious (www.delicious.com) or Diigo (www.diigo.com), you can build powerful knowledge-sharing and resource databases which can be searched according to keywords or tags.

Diigo allows you to annotate pages collaboratively, create groups for your students to share and discuss resource links, as well as generating automated tweets and blog posts.

Think of it as a tool that exponentially amplifies your resource database and exposure.

To get started see my tutorial at <http://bit.ly/bookmark2teach>



A blog (web-log or online journal) is a place where you can claim your online presence or allow your students to practice their writing skills.

Blogging platforms are mostly free and you can have your own blog site up and running in no time at all. It comes with all the built-in social media bells and whistles, like commenting facilities, RSS feeds, widgets (embedded tools from secondary sources eg a calendar or any other RSS feed), tagging (keyword metadata) and search facilities.

Students can leave comments and get feedback, or become co-authors on a class blog. The advantage of using blogging tools is that you can maintain total control. It facilitates sending blog posts using traditional modes like email which promotes easy publishing.

There are quite a few blogging platforms that make it possible to set up free, good-looking, collaborative, multi-authored or individual blogs. My favourites are Wordpress (www.wordpress.com), Blogger (www.blogger.com) and Edublogs (www.edublogs.org).

For my detailed blogging tutorial see <http://bit.ly/blog2teach>.



Googledocs (www.google.com/docs) is a collaborative online writing space for anyone wanting to work on documents or articles together. You can use it to store documents online and it makes sharing a breeze. All articles can be changed into widgets and embedded into blogs or any learning management system like Blackboard or Moodle. You can even upload a presentation and have an online live discussion session with your students. Another inventive advantage is that you can create online forms which allow for multiple choice, short as well as longer questions, an ideal feature to help with student assessment.



Knowing how to use RSS (Real Simple Syndication) feed tools efficiently can provide any student or seasoned journalist with a way to keep track of cutting edge news. You can subscribe to any blog, news source and twitter feed and it will automatically be downloaded onto your computer or mobile phone, ready for you to scan through when you have time. My favourite RSS Reader (a tool that collates RSS feeds for easy reading) is Google Reader (<http://www.google.com/reader>) which allows for sharing feeds, grouping of related feeds and mobile access for when you are on the move but want to stay in touch.



Facebook is the social networking tool of choice and it is where we will find, and connect with, our students. We do not need to befriend them and infringe on their social space or worse, navigate tricky ethical barriers, but rather gently establish a learning handshake using Facebook fan pages or groups.

Using either of these Facebook tools you can create a social space from where you can send notices, organise classroom events and aggregate learning feeds from any of the aforementioned tools using Facebook's built-in array of tools.

You can make it your classroom's informal start page to kick-start any formal assignments and discussions. I would suggest creating a Facebook group for more structured internal classroom activities and a fan page for special subject related endeavours that will require a more global marketing approach.

For how to use Facebook in the classroom see my blog post with an embedded presentation from Zaid Alsagoff at <http://bit.ly/fb2teach>

So, give each of these tools a try and if you are brave or not so brave, get your students involved in helping you set it up. Remember, it is not about the tools but about the learning.

Feedback is welcome on my blog post about this article at www.school2.co.za/2010/05/17/424/