

2024 Edition

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO ONLINE JOURNALISM



Produced by youth journalists, for youth journalists —

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INTRODUCTION

February 19th, 2022, marks the day the first The Sunday Diplomat article was published.

At our founding, our original team counted four members. We were small, new to the game, but enthusiastic. None of us had ever studied or done journalism, yet one year later, we had acquired a sizable user base of over 10,000 and the title of the largest sixth-form publication in the UK.

On this journey, we have uncovered the secrets to building a thriving publication. As you read through our guide, you will discover not just the how but also the why behind the founding of our publication. We hope our story will act as a catalyst for your own, providing the confidence and knowledge for you to seek out your own journalistic experience. Now, more than ever, the world ought to hear the thoughts of a new generation.



Initiative is key. Try, try, try again!

The Ethics and Value of Accuracy



The Importance of Accuracy

For The Sunday Diplomat and all reputable online publications, the value of accuracy is a foundational lesson. A reliable journalist must ensure thorough research and never misrepresent or forget crucial facts and actors in any topic. Our duty goes beyond fact-checking; it is about presenting information in a way that earns and maintains the trust of your audience.

The Areas Where Maintaining Accuracy Matters Most

Accuracy is the backbone of a free press the people can trust, especially in these three areas. Here are some simple tips and tricks to remember.

Statistics

1. Do not convert between numbers, percentages, and rounded values. Always try to provide the statistics as you find them.
2. Check the validity of statistics with different sources. In an era of misinformation, it is important to note statistics may be false.
3. Do not provide too many statistics to your readers. Only pick the most important few. Readers are there for your analysis, not your data-gathering skills!

Quotes

1. When referencing a quote, always check where and under what context it was said.
2. Listen to the full audio (if possible) and ensure any quote used is not out of context. Do not overload your readers by providing them with the full audio.
3. Only quote relevant actors and industry experts. As a general rule, try to avoid using quotes from random survey respondents.

Legal Terminology

1. Use the exact legal terminology you come across in your research without changing the phrasing or position. A marginal change could completely change the meaning of the term.
2. If possible, avoid using legal terminology in favor of simpler and more common descriptions.

"The smarter the journalists are, the better off society is." - Warren Buffet

Writing for the Web

The advent of the digital age heralds new opportunities in journalism. From the beginning, we designed The Sunday Diplomat as a news site built for the Internet. We understood that traditional print and web journalism are radically different and how to capitalize on both specialties. Here are three lessons to take away.

The cornerstone of web writing is Search Engine Optimization (SEO). SEO involves tailoring content to rank higher in search engine results, making it more likely to be found by readers.

Mastering SEO necessitates a careful blend of art and science, requiring the strategic use of keywords, meta descriptions, and tags. However, SEO must be balanced with journalistic intent. You must ensure that content remains engaging, informative, and of the design of your writers rather than becoming a mere vessel for SEO.

Multimedia usage is another aspect where web writing diverges from print. The ability to integrate videos, podcasts, polls, and other interactive widgets fundamentally changes the game.

What was once static paper becomes a potentially rich, multi-sensory experience. Good online publications should capitalize on widgets to maintain interest from readers. Include a poll in an opinion piece to see what the audience thinks. Throw in a link to a YouTube video or podcast that succinctly summarizes a key concept an article discusses. The possibilities are endless.

The first words a reader's eye will glance across are your headlines. Keep these interesting! Ensure that your headlines are short, snappy, and engaging. There are many strategies for designing attractive headlines.

At The Sunday Diplomat, we follow the following three rules. One, headlines should be short. Ideally, they should be as short as possible without seriously underrepresenting the content. Two, headlines should contain at most one or two advanced words but more often utilize common phrases. Three, ensure your headline is SEO-optimized, in terms of length and content.



The Essential Tools of a Successful Publication

Content Management Systems



Content Management Systems (CMS) are the backbone of any online publication. They host the website your news site accompanies and will influence almost every move you make.

Tools like WordPress and Drupal offer robust and user-friendly interfaces that allow for the efficient publication of content. For the running of The Sunday Diplomat, we use WordPress, and our advice is simple: choose a CMS that is both scalable and intuitive.

The best CMS is a CMS that you simply do not think about. A publication should focus on content rather than technical details.

Video Editing Software



In today's digital age, a successful online publication can be said to be inseparable from its visual content. To increase reader count, you should aim to accompany all articles with compelling and emotionally enriching visual aids.

Tools like Adobe Premiere Pro and Final Cut Pro both provide vastly powerful editing capabilities to enhance storytelling.

Furthermore, with the advent of AI, you may be interested in using tools like DALL-E to generate images that are tailor-made to your article and avoid legal trouble.

Social Media Platforms



Social media is arguably among the best ways to boost the amount of readers you have. Key platforms for creating a publication account include TikTok, Instagram, Threads, X (formerly known as Twitter), and Facebook.

By promoting your articles and trying to create viral content on these accounts, you can gain exposure to new readers and even create repeat readers. We at The Sunday Diplomat have used this method repeatedly. Similar to online publications, the key to success on social media is SEO optimization.

A very successful social media platform can itself transform into a platform for spreading news, as seen with the rise of many news sites that are social media exclusive.

Fair Use



In the digital world where content is shared and accessed worldwide, mastering the legal aspects of online publishing is not just a necessity - it is a responsibility. At The Sunday Diplomat, we navigate these legal waters with a keen awareness of Fair Use.

Copyright Laws protect the original work of creators, like written articles, photographs, and videos. As online publishers, it is crucial to respect these rights by appropriately citing sources.

Fair Use is a provision that allows limited use of copyrighted material whether or not permission is granted for criticism, education, or news reporting. However, it is a nuanced area, and misunderstandings can lead to complications.

Building Online Communities

Online communities are the essential ingredient to any thriving online publication. Here is how to build them.

The key to an online community is interaction. Always respond to comments promptly, solicit feedback, and talk with readers.

Remember, an engaged community does not happen by accident. It is built through interactive features like live discussions, polls, and reader spotlights. These initiatives encourage users to not only engage with the content but also with each other.



Something we at The Sunday Diplomat keep in mind is the importance of keeping dialogue relevant. Whenever our readers email us, we always analyze the patterns. What content drives the most interest? When were we contacted? How can we maximize those values? Never chase for interaction simply for interaction - ensure it is an organic product of good journalism and SEO.

Another core pillar of driving engagement is delivering new content. At The Sunday Diplomat, we are constantly expanding our publication into new horizons, from research papers to this very guide. This is a tried and true strategy and one we strongly suggest you adopt. With such widespread access to the Internet today, a publication should consistently create new content.



Thoughts of a New Generation

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