**Proposal: The Huntley High School Voice Online**

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**Summary:** For 14 years, students in the Huntley High School journalism program have published The Voice, the school’s award-winning student newspaper. In the fall of 2011, the staff of the Voice, under the leadership of adviser Dennis Brown and online editor Michael Geheren, would like to launch huntleyvoice.com, its new online newspaper, in an effort to (1) better reach its audience and (2) provide students in the program with an experience that better matches what is going on in journalism today. Though the basics of journalism are the same and will be taught, the format will change to match the brave new world of media that is out there, allowing for more timeliness, interactivity, and use of multimedia.

Currently, the print version of the Voice publishes news, sports, and feature stories on school-related events and individuals; entertainment reviews/articles on happenings of interest to students; and opinion articles, including staff editorials, on a wide range of topics, including those affecting the district. Students who are not on staff are encouraged to submit letters to the editor so they too can express their views. Currently, the Voice is published once per month, eight times per year.

Huntleyvoice.com would allow the newspaper to publish its stories in a more timely fashion, moving breaking news and sports to the website, leaving more in-depth coverage to the print version. Entertainment coverage could also be more timely, allowing reviewers to publish their views closer to CD and movie release dates. Opinion articles would also be published on the website as blogs or as columns, allowing for more interactivity with readers who may wish to post comments of their own. The website would also allow for more use of multimedia, such as twitter feeds from events such as sporting events and meetings and a wider use of video and audio.

It is huntleyvoice.com’s mission to continue Huntley High School’s tradition of award-winning journalism repackaged for its computer-using clientele. Moving the content to the website would also allow students in the program to learn more about the changing world of journalism today, better preparing them for careers in the industry should they choose to pursue them in the future. Publishing the website would open up a whole new world of organization and creativity, challenging them to re-envision the publication for the Internet, as well as the marketing and advertising that goes along with it.

**Scheduling**: As it stands, the Voice is published monthly. At the beginning of each cycle, staffers are asked to gather ideas from sources throughout the building which are then pooled into one master idea list. That list is circulated throughout the class, staff members choose teams to write for, and each team chooses its ideas from the list. They then have three weeks to produce three drafts, which are turned in to editors for critique/coaching, and me for grading. Photography and artwork are also planned and turned in at different times throughout the month. Once the articles and photos are ready, editors start their layout of the paper, typically on a Sunday morning. They finish on Tuesday and distribute the paper on Friday. Once done, the cycle starts all over again. Here is an example of a monthly schedule:

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Monday** | **Tuesday** | **Wednesday** | **Thursday** | **Friday** |
| *Week 1* | Ideas due | Teams chosen, ideas distributed | Planning | Reporting/writing | Reporting/writing |
| *Week 2* | Draft 1 due | Draft 1 returned | Reporting/writing | Reporting/writing | Draft 2 due |
| *Week 3* | Draft 2 returned | Reporting/writing | Reporting/writing | Draft 3 due | Photo/art saved |
| *Week 4* | Layout | Layout | Paper to printer | Delivery | Distribution |

With the new website, our journalists will have two different conduits to think about: the print version of the Voice and the online version. Because of this, their planning will have to have two conduits as well: stories/ideas for the website and stories/ideas for the print Voice. To deal with this, we will implement the following:

1. **Content planning: Print edition**: Students will gather story ideas, and plan for the print edition of the Voice as they always have.
2. **Content planning: Website**: On a second day of planning, students will then be asked to join one of seven teams that will gather content for the web. These teams will be:
3. *Sports scores*: Four people to take this on, one person per week. All scores from each sport posted during the week. Students on this team will learn to post themselves. They will be given a sheet of phone numbers with multiple contacts for all teams.
4. *News beat*: A team of students will work on a four week rotation, writing news stories to be published twice per week. Stories will be roughly four paragraphs, with at least two quotes (by two different people) and a photo that the writers have taken.
5. *Sports beat*: Writers will be doing previews/recaps of big games. Goal will be for coverage of a few big games each week. Coverage will be decided by the sports team. Stories will be fully developed with multiple sources. Writers will shoot pictures as well and post stories to the website. This team may also work on twice weekly player profiles (3-4 questions) with photos.
6. *Social media*: Students on this team engage the audience, learn the medium and are FRIENDLY with those they interact with. They are balanced with their interaction (links/interaction). They post scores of major games. Individuals are in charge of FB or Twitter. Interact with followers on Twitter/Facebook to build a loyal following. Pick well developed or important stories to push out as they are posted. Develop story recaps of big games and breaking news.
7. *Multimedia*: Will create multimedia pieces for huntleyvoice.com. Team with work on a line up rotation, taking assignments as they are needed. These will be fully developed multimedia pieces to be used to accompany pieces in the newspaper.
8. *Live coverage*: This team will cover events live in different capacities. They will work in rotation to cover at least one big game a week on Twitter. A small group will work in a rotation to cover at least one big game a week through live video, integrating FB and Twitter with coverage. There will be a small group that works with the news team to cover major breaking news live.
9. *Blogs*: Write a weekly blog on a topic of your choice.

The members of these teams will plan their own content that will be posted on the website throughout the month. An online content manager will schedule each of these assignments so that content is updated daily.

Students enrolled in the yearbook class will also contribute content to huntleyvoice.com, providing a supplement to the coverage in the book, and providing a tool to drive sales. Huntleyvoice.com will have a link to the yearbook content, which also includes information on ordering books, lists of individuals who have ordered books, and information about ordering past books.

**Editing and posting of materials**: Because posting of content will be quicker than with print, editing of articles will l be done by editors and overseen by the adviser using kapost, an online management software specifically created for journalists. Kapost would allow a staff writer to post a story online, which then could be viewed by other editors, staff writers and the adviser. Editors could then suggest changes to articles, either by adding comments to the article or through a chat window on the page. With this, the writer could make changes on the spot, allowing for quicker turnaround. Articles could then be posted to huntleyvoice.com through Wordpress quickly and easily.

Michael learned of this software in his job as a staff writer for The Mash, a publication of the Chicago Tribune focused on high school students. At first, kapost seemed like something we would not be able to use as it is relatively new and very expensive. But Michael placed a call to kapost and asked if they would be interested in allowing the huntleyvoice.com staff to use the software for free, given that we are an educational institution. The powers that be at kapost agreed to this arrangement, and offered to do a story on the staff and editors of huntleyvoice.com, showing how a high school journalism program utilized their product. As of today, this arrangement was approved by Marisa Burkhart and Mike Moan in a meeting we had 7/19/11. We all think it would provide a unique opportunity for our students to use a program that is at the cutting edge of online journalism today.

**Twitter**: We would like reporters on the Voice staff will be able to use Twitter to report events as they happen and post the Twitter feeds on huntleyvoice.com. Examples of this would include board meetings, the Ms. Huntley contest, the Homecoming parade, and sporting events. We would set up two different threads on Twitter: one for HHSNEWS and a second for HHSSPORTS. Students who will be using Twitter for these purposes will be trained the proper use of Twitter as their posts will be readable immediately without any editing. This training will include the importance of journalistic integrity including credibility, objectivity, accuracy and good taste. The use of Twitter will also be subject to editorial oversight; should a tweet be posted that falls outside the guidelines, an editor can remove the tweet immediately. Those who follow hhsvoice.com twitter feeds will not be able to reply within the thread, removing the possibility of negative comments within.

**Software/cost:**

*Hosting*: The website will be hosted by BlueHost, Inc., which is located in Provo, Utah. The cost of hosting the website is roughly $85 per year, which includes the purchase of the domain name huntleyvoice.com.

*Content management system*: The huntleyvoice.com website will use Wordpress for all design, management, organization and posting of content. This is the standard content management system for most journalism websites on the Internet.

**Interactivity/comments**: As it stands, the current editorial policy regarding letters to the editor is as follows:

*The Voice encourages letters to the editor so that readers might share in the opportunities of scholastic free press in an open forum. The Voice will accept only signed letters that meet laws and standards regarding libel, defamation, obscenity and invasion of privacy rules. Signatures may be withheld upon request or in rare instances when the writer can show the editorial board the need to remain anonymous.*

*The opinions editor will attempt to verify authorship of all letters. The Voice reserves the right to reject or edit letters for length, content or grammatical correctness. All letters must meet letter submission guidelines. Letter submission deadlines will be announced at the beginning of the school year and as each issue is produced.*

In keeping with this policy, huntleyvoice.com will encourage comments on its website as it encourages letters to the editor. To deal with questionable content, however, the following policies will be put in place:

1. Anyone who wishes to comment must login using their Twitter or Facebook identities, or create an account using Intense Debate, insuring, as much as we can, that no anonymity will be possible.
2. All comments will be subject to approval by the online editor before posting. Approval standards will follow the same guidelines mentioned in the letters to the editor policy above, in line with the United States Supreme Court decisions in *Tinker v. Des Moines (1968), Bethel v. Fraser (1986), and Hazelwood v. Kuhlmeier (1988).*

In addition, we are also looking into the possibility of using polls with certain stories to create the instant ability to express their views.

We will also look into hosting “guest bloggers,” students who may want space on the website to express their views. Students who would be interested in this could apply for a position, be given deadlines like any other member of the newspaper staff, and challenged to market/promote their blog to the student body.

**Online media and liability issues:** In preparing this proposal, the question has come up: What if, somehow, a student posted a comment on our website that is libelous? Would the school district be liable for the content of these comments? In short, no; the district would not be liable, due to Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act of 1996. The following paragraph explains this Section and why it was added; it comes from the Student Press Law Center Paper “Understand Your Cybershield” (<http://www.splc.org/pdf/cybershield.pdf>) (my comments are in parentheses):

*Congress passed Section 230 as part of the CDA in 1996. This section of the law is entitled, “Protection for Private Blocking and Screening of Offensive Material.” Section 230(c), which is labeled “Protection for ‘good Samaritan’ blocking and screening of offensive material” states that “[n]o provider or user of an interactive computer service (such as huntleyvoice.com) shall be treated as the publisher or speaker of any information provided by another information content provider (such as a person who posts a comment to one of our stories).” The law goes on to state that protection applies even when moderators take steps to screen certain material from discussion forums (as we will). Specifically, the law states, “no provider or user of an interactive computer service provider shall be liable on account of . . . any action voluntarily taken in good faith to restrict access to . . . material that the provider or user considers to be obscene, lewd, lascivious, filthy, excessively violent, harassing, or otherwise objectionable, whether or not such material is constitutionally protected. . .*

*Courts have produced a substantial body of case law applying Section 230 to the rapidly evolving mix of entities interacting in cyberspace. Generally, courts have taken a broad view of who is entitled to Section 230’s protections and how far those protections extend. . .Although no published decisions have directly applied Section 230 to student media, it now is well established that the statute covers virtually all websites.*

*To qualify for immunity, student media must prove that the content at issue was created by an entity distinct from the publication (again, such as a commenter). Obviously, student media are “content providers” for material they create themselves, and the statute would not protect them from liability for such material. For example, student media will be liable for any defamatory content in stories written by student reporters, regardless of whether those stories appear in print or online editions.*

These last two sentences have informed our content decisions since the Voice began publication back in 1997. Because of this, students who are part of the publications staffs are not allowed to publish anything that is even remotely libelous. This understanding would not change with regard to the content published by student staff members who work for huntleyvoice.com.

**Online media and FERPA:** Given the ease of access of school newspaper websites, districts in the past have expressed concerns regarding student privacy and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). When I researched the law regarding this, I found this explanation/discussion from Mark Goodman, former head of the Student Press Law Center and currently a professor and Knight Chair in Scholastic Journalism at the Center for Scholastic Journalism at Kent State University:

*FERPA only prohibits schools and school employees from disclosing student education records without consent.*

*In order to subject the student media to FERPA, the student media would have to be considered within its definition of “educational agency or institution,” which the Act defines as “any public or private agency or institution which is the recipient of federal funds under any applicable program.” To categorize them as such, a court would first need to rule that student journalists are employees or agents of their school, a classification so far rejected by every court asked to consider the question. As one federal court said, “Congress could not have constitutionally prohibited comment on, or discussion of, facts about a student which were learned independently of his school records.”*

*The U.S. Department of Education is responsible for investigating FERPA claims, enforcing the Act when a violation occurs and issuing regulations regarding its enforcement. The Department has said that it does not consider student media subject to the law. “FERPA was not intended to apply to campus newspapers or records maintained by campus newspapers. Rather, FERPA applies to ‘education records’ maintained by an educational agency or institution, or by a person acting for such agency or institution.” Most importantly, the Department of Education has never enforced a FERPA claim against a school for something published in the student media.*

Given this, I don’t think huntleyvoice.com will change anything with regard to our compliance with this law. If there are any concerns regarding student privacy and FERPA, please let me know.

**Marketing**: To market the new huntleyvoice.com, my staff and I have many ideas:

* School announcements, bookmark prompts on the district’s website and utilizing Facebook to get students to “like” our page. Those who “like” the huntleyvoice.com on their Facebook pages would receive updates every week of stories appearing online, as is done with professional papers attached to short teasers regarding the content of those articles. We can offer incentives for liking the website, such as free yearbooks, iTunes gift cards, etc.
* Mass email to parents asking them if they would like to “like” us on Facebook as well. This could be especially effective for parents who may want to attend board meetings or sporting events but could follow our twitter feed for those events. Could use huntleyneighbors.com to market it as well.
* Link on the district website and high school website to huntleyvoice.com.
* Twitter updates linking subscribers to newly posted content.
* To attract more mobile device users, plans are in place to develop a web app for huntleyvoice.com, allowing for access on iPhones, droid phones, etc. This web app would be developed through Wordpress through a plug in called Wordpress Touch Pro. This plug in would make the web app automatically as the content of the website was updated. In addition, users could be notified when new articles are posted, as would users on Facebook who “like” huntleyvoice.com.

**Photography**: As part of huntleyvoice.com, photographers will able to post far more photos than can be published in the print editions of the newspaper and yearbook. Photo slide shows will feature student work that can be viewed by users of the site. Surplus photos will also be sold on smugmug.com, allowing parents and students to purchase prints, mugs, t-shirts, etc. using photos taken at public events.

Huntleyvoice.com will also allow for more interactivity with the audience. Students who visit the website could have the opportunity to submit photos of their own as part of a “photo of the month” contest, for publication in either huntleyvoice.com or in the school yearbook.

**Legal issues regarding the sale of photography**: In preparing this proposal, I was asked by Marisa and Mike about the legality of the sale of our surplus photos. They had asked whether or not the photos would be available for purchase by anyone in the community, and whether this was legally risky. I asked this question of Frank LoMonte, the director of the Student Press Law Center in Washington DC. The SPLC is the top source for legal advice and guidance in the nation and an organization that I have consulted many times over the years when legal/ethical issues come up. Mr. LoMonte basically told me that events such as basketball games, theater performances or other “open to the public” events are events that anyone can attend and photograph, and this is perfectly legal. Selling the photos on our website would be no different than selling a ticket to a person and allowing him/her to photograph the event. In addition, he pointed out that there are plenty of other outlets (like professional newspapers) where people can buy photos of high school student athletes and performers, or download them from newspaper websites already.

Marisa then asked me a follow up question:

*What about photos of students and/or teachers from events that are not public – such as things that take place during the school day? Students in gym class, a goofy picture of a teacher, etc. Distributing those on the internet and the possibility of selling those images are what we still have questions about.*

I forwarded her question to the SPLC and received the following response from attorney advocate, Adam Goldstein:

*Not to answer a question with a question but--what's going on during the school day that the public shouldn't know about? The legal questions don't change in any of those scenarios, really; the law doesn't have a concept of the kind of "non-public" space you're talking about. Legally, if you can be seen by 30 of your peers, you're not in private, and there's no legal distinction between that and being seen by a football stadium full of people. Private things are things that happen in private and things that aren't private are public.   
  
I do understand the distinction, though. But I don't think it stands up to scrutiny. I get the visceral idea that there's a generalized, free-floating safety concern about students. But the purpose of not permitting members of the public to wander around a public school building isn't to prevent the public from discovering what goes on there. And if a generalized, free-floating safety concern could justify preventing students from doing something, students wouldn't ever do anything.   
  
It's like selling a picture of the kitchen in a restaurant: access to the public is restricted, but not because we don't want you to see the lobsters playing the harmonica and singing "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot."*

**Advertising:** Going online may offer huntleyvoice.com with a unique opportunity to offer our advertisers to purchase advertising online. For this, we would sell ads much as we do with the Voice newspaper, offering space on the website for a month at a time for a fee. We could add the advertising sizes to the existing ad contract, price them accordingly (front page versus inside pages), and help design ads for businesses if they wanted. Such ad space would be limited and would be explained to businesses as such.

**Multimedia**: The huntleyvoice.com would allow students on staff to explore the use of multimedia to present their journalistic content. Some ideas we have discussed:Students could be provided with video cameras which would allow them to gather, edit and package content for posting on the website and even downloading as podcasts. This could include:

* News and sports reports and interviews.
* 20 questions with a person of prominence or even with an average student in the building. Imbed video of the student doing what he/she does best.
* Round table discussions where staffers talk about issues of relevance, sports, or even a movie or restaurant they’ve just seen/visited.
* Movie/CD reviews can feature audio and movie clips which can be downloaded from press websites for free. Audio clips can also be downloaded from artists’ websites.
* Advice column interviews where students talk to a licensed counselor about issues of concern to the student body.
* Comedic news reports or even cartoons (done properly/tastefully of course).
* Special reports on more in depth topics, allowing for use of video, audio, photos and articles storytelling. For example, I saw a story on Washingtonpost.com about soldiers coming back from war with traumatic brain injuries. The video featured interviews with soldiers talking about their experiences and the struggles they face. The audio/infographics explained the science of brain injuries. A second video presentation on “The Changed Brain” delves deeper into traumatic brain injuries can affect a soldier’s personality. And last, the actual print feature story was published as well.
* Video blogs where students with a bit more acting experience could “perform” a column/blog that they have prepared for an audience.
* Slideshows featuring photos and audio edited together to create a unique portrait of individuals. An example of this is the NY Times’ “One in Eight Million.”
* A pdf version of the published Voice newspaper will be available online, allowing readers to page through an animated version like the normal newspaper.

To facilitate this change, we will most likely be purchasing some flip cameras or something similar to allow for filming. Editing can be done through Adobe Premiere Pro, which we already have in our computer lab. Students could also use their own iPods or iPhones to record video, photos and audio for these projects. We also may be appointing a multimedia editor to handle the creation of our multimedia applications.

**Accessibility issues:** Currently there are some websites that are blocked by Shelterbelt that Michael and I would like to be unblocked for students in the newspaper and yearbook classes. They include the following:

1. Twitter: Mike, Marisa and I talked about the possibility of unblocking twitter for the publications students, for use as a tool to promote the huntleyvoice.com website and research what other journalists are posting minute by minute. Marisa thought that she would be able to unblock this for my students for these purposes.
2. Screencast: Site for hosting videos. In this site, my editors and I could store video tutorials on creating various projects for the website. These videos could be categorized into folders and be accessible from school or home. Given that youtube is blocked at school, it would also be a site for storing videos that we created for the website that would allow students at school who visit our website to see the videos.
3. Slideshare: Would allow for publically presented PowerPoints (such as from board meetings) to be uploaded so they could be viewed online. (May also be a good idea for teachers who would like to upload PowerPoints from their classes.)
4. Smugmug: Site for uploading photos and selling them.

In addition, I would like to be able to download the following programs for use in the journalism labs and in my classroom:

1. Filezilla: Allows for access to the websites folders, which would allow us to upload bigger files (like videos and slideshows) that could not be uploaded through Wordpress.
2. Audacity: Program for editing audio files.
3. Soundslides: Program for creating slideshows.
4. Jing: Allows user to create training videos with what is on the screen, recording mouse movements and audio simultaneously. Also allows user to do partial screen captures, add text bubbles and arrows and save as graphic files for the creation of training handouts.

**Future planning: Summer of 2011:** Throughout the summer, Michael Geheren, the editorial board, and I will continue to work on plans for huntleyvoice.com. It is not our goal to just get the website going; we would like the website to be a “must visit” spot for both students and members of the Huntley community for information, commentary and entertainment. As part of this, I visited the University of Iowa July 11-15 for a summer workshop entitled “Digital Media Production for High School Journalism Advisers,” taught by Aaron Manfull, the adviser at Francis Howell North HS in St. Charles, Mo. Aaron is known throughout the country as one of the top online journalism advisers, and attending his workshop added greatly to the knowledge I already have compiled. I will also make it my business to do extensive research on many websites including jeadigitalmedia.org, onlinejournalismblog.com and [socialmediatoday.com.](http://socialmediatoday.com/index.php?q=SMC/188097)

**Conclusion**: Given the benefits for both the students in the newspaper journalism class and our tech savvy audience, I ask that you allow this change of curriculum and give us the green light to launch huntleyvoice.com. As of now, I would like to have student editors begin working on content for the website, posting stories relating to events happening earlier in the school year, but not publishing the content or “launching” the website just yet. We would not formally launch the website until the end of October, when all of the student staffers for huntleyvoice.com could be trained and organized. This would coincide with the publishing of our first issue of the print Voice, and make for a website that is up and running at its full potential.

With the planning that has been done thus far, I have no doubt that the website will continue the tradition of excellent journalism that HHS has come to expect.