



JTP Launches New Band of Citizen Journalists

Web 2.0, audio and video editing, converged content and online media ethics were a few of the topics tackled in a five-day workshop on "Citizen/Online Journalism" that drew eager bloggers seeking to hone their skills in cyber publishing.

"The information was concentrated and important, so I suggest the organization of specialized training in photography, and audio and video editing separately," said **Hasan Al Mustafa** a news producer at Lebanon's LBC Satellite channel.

He was particularly pleased with the hands-on work during the training that allowed participants from Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and Iraq to set up their own blogs (web logs), shoot digital pictures and video, work with images and understand file resolution, integrate feeds into their blogs, and create multimedia packages for the Web.

"The basic question is how are we going to adapt? My aim is to help you find ways of adapting that work for you," said trainer **Jessica Dheere** of the tips and exercises she presented, adding that there was no one way of producing online content, but rather that bloggers could customize it for their individual use.

Dheere reviewed the pros and cons of various blogging platforms and discussed case studies illustrating the magnitude of the impact citizen journalism tools like Facebook, YouTube and other social media were having on the reporting process regionally and globally.

She said mainstream media have often picked up on stories that first appeared in blogs and social media by shedding more light on them through in-depth coverage they would not have otherwise considered.

Mohammad Najm briefed the journalists on Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds, tagging and social bookmarking to make their blogs more effective and more widely accessed.

"You'll see the results as soon as I return to Baghdad," promised **Haidar Fadhel Jouda**, whose work for the Iraqi civil society Al Amal organization was undoubtedly enriched by his enthusiasm and speed of learning all the latest citizen journalism techniques.

The workshop July ٢١-٢٥, organized by the American University of Beirut's Journalism Training Program (JTP) and sponsored by the German Heinrich Boll Foundation, grouped ١٠ journalists representing LBC Sat, Iraqi-Lebanese Al Sumariya TV, Voice of Beirut Radio, pan-Arab daily *Asharq Al-Awsat*, Lebanese business website Nufooz.com, the Iraqi Al Amal organization, Lebanon's *Al Mustaqbal* daily, Model Iraqi Youth media, and Saudi Arabia's *Al Riyadh* daily.

According to BBC-Brasil.com Lebanon correspondent **Tariq Saleh**, most major international newspaper websites are providing more tools and multimedia options like video, audio, text and photos so that readers/browsers can have access to full reports.

Most readers browsing journalists' blogs tend to believe their contents, **Saleh** said, referring to studies conducted in Brazil and the United States, noting that information available on such sites often surpassed that provided by traditional media.

"As a BBC reporter you don't just write, you make videos, audio, report for TV, so you need the tools," **Saleh** said, demonstrating the equipment he uses for producing his reports for the BBC's Brazilian audio-visual and online service.

Participants roamed the AUB campus in search of stories, shot footage, took pictures, interviewed summer students and each other, and put together multimedia reports they produced, edited and uploaded onto their blogs as part of group projects that were shown and critiqued on the last day of training.

They were immersed in technical details and provided with tip sheets on the most effective ways of recording sound, holding cameras while shooting video, and linking to relevant websites.

JTP director **Magda Abu-Fadil** also provided the journalists with a healthy dollop of media ethics in a presentation meant to highlight the pitfalls of speed of online news publishing, questionable sources and unbalanced coverage. Also on tap was a discussion of cyber copyrights.

"When I shared what I'd learned with my colleagues at work, they thought it was very interesting," said

Carole Sabty, an executive producer for highly regarded talk and public affairs programs on LBC's satellite channel.

She said journalists in Lebanon, particularly at LBC, lacked adequate knowledge and skills in online journalism.

Although well versed in broadcast media, **Sabty** said 90% of the workshop's content was new to her while 10% was information she already knew but that needed updating.

"I hope the next workshop focuses on 'one-man show (TV) reporters'," **Sabty** added.