

**"Communique Online:
Envisioning Beyond 2000"
www.communique.qut.edu.au**

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This paper documents the concept and vision behind the QUT School of Media & Journalism's electronic paper and its future directions. Communique Online is part of News Production, a 14-week unit offered in Semester Two. It combines the efforts of a group of dedicated third year journalism students who have taken on different roles from writing, sub-editing down to the final layout and HTML design. Portions of this paper were presented at the Journalism Educators Association Conference 2000.

Communiqué Online: Envisioning Beyond 2000

**by Nisar Keshvani <nisar@keshvani.com>
Managing Editor, *Communiqué Online***

What is *Communiqué Online*?

Communiqué Online is QUT Journalism's flagship online publication. Produced by third year journalism students under the supervision of lecturing staff, *Communiqué Online* was developed to address the growing importance of the online medium as a media vehicle.

A 'real-world' online newsroom was set up to provide students with a practical, hands-on working environment, equipping them with necessary skills to function and operate an online newsroom.

QUT is a leading institute of higher education and has pioneered an online journalism curriculum for its students. Today's Communications and Information Technology (CIT) climate is increasing in importance, and demands media practitioners rely on computer applications to research, produce and publish stories in the shortest possible time.

Online research, publications and access to public records in electronic form have brought about a revolution in reporting and the evolution of a new way to approach the traditional functions of a journalist. This new method is referred to as computer-assisted reporting (CAR).

Communiqué Online is designed to provide journalism students with practical, real world exposure in developing and maintaining an electronic news source. It is a spin-off from the print version of our established tabloid newspaper *Communiqué*.

Communiqué Online displays the highest standards of student journalism with news and feature stories covering a diverse interest base. Articles range from sports, human interest features and QUT-related articles, to news stories concerning Australia. Though campus based, the fortnightly e-zine can cover anything at all in the world. It has the resources for high quality illustration and is accessible to global audiences through an obvious, high profile QUT portal – <http://www.communique.qut.edu.au>

Brief history

Communiqué Online was launched in early 1996 to meet two primary needs;

- i) to develop a WWW presence and;
- ii) to give students an opportunity to work on an online newspaper.

It was introduced as part of an existing unit MJB303 News Production, a third year unit. Students filed reports for QUT's in-house programmes on the multi-cultural radio broadcaster, 4EB, QUT News on community television station, Bris31, and in-house publications - *Communiqué* and *Communiqué Online* for assessment.

Then lecturers Suellen Tapsall and Carolyn Varley with help from student Shane McLeod and computer support officer Danny Carroll were instrumental in its development. Using a simple masthead, template design and content from *Communiqué*, *Communiqué Online* was launched. That year *Communiqué Online* was awarded Best Publication (Any medium) by the Journalism Educators Association (JEA).

In 1997, husband and wife team Graham (who tutored in various units at QUT) and Shirley Cairns, Internet enthusiasts were hired to develop a frame-based site and transferred *Communiqué* content from print to Web.

The following year, *Communiqué Online* was redeveloped by students Daniel Bolton, Patrick Cooney, Jennifer Dudley and Nisar Keshvani. Bolton and Cooney were responsible for the site's graphical, technical and interface elements, Dudley performed the role of chief sub-editor and Keshvani

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Journalism Educators Association (JEA))

Journalism Education Futures Conference, Australia

<http://www.communique.qut.edu.au>

coordinated production and introduced online audio and video streaming to the site.

For the first time, four editions were produced with approximately 40 per cent original content. Audio and video packages were transferred online from QUT's 4EB and Briz 31 programmes. That year, the online paper was awarded the inaugural Dr Charles Stuart Ossie for Best Student Publication, and Best Publication (Any Medium) by the JEA.

In 1999, unit coordinators Cathy Jenkins and Leo Bowman decided to incorporate *Communique Online* as a fourth medium and introduce online news production with formal contact time, and workshops. Prior to this, students worked on *Communique Online* informally, with minimal supervision, and in their own capacity.

Keshvani, then a postgraduate student researching online journalism, was tasked with pioneering its structure and introducing it as academic proper. Based on the initial set up experience, Keshvani, now an online journalism lecturer, fine-tuned the teaching process in 2000. To meet the needs of our growing audience and reflect the times, *Communique Online* 2000 was re-developed by students Kylie Johnston, Samantha Peters, Joscelyne O'Flaherty, Gary Sim, Sharon Foo and Mia Scaggiante.

As part of the online curriculum, students undergo workshops introducing them to HTML, and web content development before starting work on the online paper. During the two-week production process, students have a total 16-hour formal contact time with the lecturer when they gather stories, sub-edit copy, mark up HTML pages, source for audio, video, graphics, and transfer audio packages online.

Awards

1996 - Best Publication (Any medium) from the Journalism Educators Association (JEA).

1998 - The inaugural Dr Charles Stuart Ossie for Best Student Publication and;
Best Publication (Any Medium) from the JEA.

What are our objectives?

Short-term Goals

- * To provide QUT Journalism students with the opportunity to produce a 'live' online news product
- * To introduce students to essential Computer-Assisted Reporting concepts, web design, Internet, and content development skills.
- * To provide QUT Journalism students with a platform to refine and showcase their online journalistic skills.

Long-term Goals

- * To create a significant online presence and develop a sizable global readership.
- * To become a formidable online news source developed by students for the broader community.
- * To provide an avenue for potential employers to view the work of QUT students.

Our Target Audience

Primary Target Audience

- * 18 to 25 year olds
- * Accessible publics throughout the world.

* University students worldwide

Secondary Target Audience

* Potential employers in both print and electronic media

* WWW users with an interest in Australia

Communiqué Online's strategy

Communiqué Online strives to emulate the country's top newspapers and online magazines. It aims to combine traditional newspaper layout with new media design and brings the print medium to a new dimension in cyberspace.

Various columns have been created to appeal to as wide a target audience as possible. Besides providing hard news about events in Australia, there are human interest stories, sports, IT articles, web feature specials and entertainment stories to appeal to the general Internet community.

The layout is clean and simple with two basic colors used consistently - blue and orange on a white background – to avoid a busy look. *Communiqué Online* is designed for easy navigation and access with simple and intuitive column headings. There are three layers to the *Communiqué Online* website. Readers can access lead stories, through the main index page, browse stories by section, or access stories through the In Brief section (a list all stories in the edition). Every story is also available in text-only format via the Print Me link – allowing quick access and printing.

The main objective is to keep files sizes small to allow for quick, easy access and immediate download. (Studies show that Internet surfers click out of sites when pages take too much time to load). Images and photographs are used to spice up the pages and visually stimulate readers. Again they are kept at a minimum with small file sizes to allow for quick access.

A template approach was employed to allow quick web page production, ease of use for students, and an uncomplicated production process.

The QUT journalism course trains students in the various print, broadcast and online media. This electronic paper showcases student packages from these platforms and combines them into a single web portal - *Communiqué Online*.

This strategy is in-line with the current industry trend of the evolving 'Integrated Newsroom'. QUT strongly believes that journalists of the future will be multimedia experts and multi-skilled news providers. Future journalists will be one-person news feeds; providing radio interviews, visual footage as well as news copy almost instantaneously as a news story breaks.

Communiqué Online and QUT's journalism course provides the foundation for this industry development and trains its students to be professional journalists. Our students are equipped with sub-editing, Internet publishing, electronic newsgathering and basic radio and television production skills.

How we manage Communiqué Online?

Communiqué Online is fairly autonomous and run by a group of third-year QUT Journalism students with guidance from lecturers who have had extensive industry experience. Running a news web site is a massive exercise involving coordination and careful planning. *Communiqué Online* is managed as a separate and independent entity from the print version of Communiqué.

First to third year journalism students contribute stories to *Communiqué Online*. Stories are primarily sourced from journalism units such as Feature Writing, Journalism Information Systems, Journalistic Inquiry, News Production, News Writing, Sub-editing & Layout and Public Affairs Reporting.

4EB/Briz 31 News

Stories are not limited to the basic print form. Short news grabs from the daily radio program, QUT Journalism News, are transferred to audio format and uploaded on *Communiqué Online*. The daily half-hour news program is produced and presented by QUT students and aired on local community radio station, 4EB.

In addition, television news stories prepared for our program on the community TV station Briz 31 are uploaded in web format. Combined, these features display print, broadcast and electronic material developed by Journalism students.

Due to the vast amount of radio news stories and current affairs packages generated each day for the programs, the best stories are selected, transferred to audio or video format and uploaded to *Communiqué Online*.

As the electronic paper is not confined by space or deadline constraints, there are hardly any limitations to the number of stories that can be uploaded. Student-developed radio documentaries will also feature periodically.

Columns & Their Scope

News

This column carries news stories examining issues and developments.

Features

Current affairs stories, personality profiles and human interest items.

Sports

Local sports stories and profiles.

Entertainment

Film, video, music, concert reviews and entertainment items.

Cybercentral

Internet, technology related stories.

Online Live

It carries groundbreaking radio and television stories from our 4EB and Briz 31 programs.

Letters

Letters and feedback from *Communiqué Online* audience.

In Depth

Extended feature items produced specially for the web consisting of a main story, background information, links and can include audio/video material.

About Us

Presently, it carries the concept and vision behind *Communiqué Online*. Long-term plans include links to global news sites and QUT journalism lecturer/students web pages.

Back Issues

An archive of editions dating back to 1996.

In Brief

A text version (site map) of the current edition with stories listed by section and headline.

Editorial team members and roles

Managing Editor

The Managing Editor (faculty staff) conducts and oversees online workshops. The role primarily involves introducing students to essential Computer-Assisted Reporting concepts, web design, image manipulation, Internet, and web content development skills. He/She facilitates and supervises the production process, ensuring the smooth upload of web pages to the QUT system. The Managing Editor oversees *Communiqué Online's* content for factual errors and ensures the highest standards of journalism are met prior to uploading.

Content Manager

The Content Manager ensures production deadlines are met, makes editorial decisions, sub-edits stories and ensures the in-house style guide is adhered to. He/She liaises between the Managing Editor and editorial team.

Production Coordinator

The Production Coordinator oversees the technical production of the site. His/her task is to assist section editors, with technical issues. The Coordinator checks all links work and the site is in good condition.

NB. The Content Manager and Production Coordinator work closely with the Managing Editor.

News/Features/Entertainment/Sports/CyberCentral/In Depth Editors

The Section Editors are tasked with gathering articles from various sources, sub-editing articles, coordinating photographs and/or illustrations for each edition. After marking up stories in HTML format, they are responsible for adding links and ensuring their section works.

Online Live Editor

The Online Live editor sources for audio/video packages from QUT's in house programmes on 4EB/Briz 31. After stories are selected, they are transcribed, marked up and uploaded online in a compressed web format.

Feedback and evaluation channels

Communiqué Online's feedback channel enables readers to voice their opinion and comments. We view their evaluation seriously and consider it important for raising the standards of the online paper. The basic channels of feedback are:

Electronic mail

Email is the basic channel for feedback. It is an avenue for readers to suggest possible story ideas and communicate directly with the *Communiqué Online* Managing Editor. Readers can email comments to: communiqué@mail.com

Online Survey

To cater to the needs of our readers, an on-line survey will be developed in future. Through this feedback channel, site managers can review the popularity of specific columns and improve the contents of *Communiqué Online* and understand our readership needs.

Hits/Statistics Counter

Communiqué Online is linked to an automatic statistics counter. It is ideal for developing an accurate reader profile. This service allows the Editorial team to understand which country our readers come from, date and time of visits, and their favourite pages. Through this counter, we will be able to meet the needs of our readers evaluate the success of our site.

What the future holds for *Communiqué Online*?

Photo Salon

A photography unit is offered at QUT and is popular with journalism students. Plans in the pipeline include introducing a column called Photo Salon to showcase photo essays and creative work produced by our students.

Mailing List

As an added feature to our site, readers can subscribe to our mailing list. This list will keep them abreast of story updates and provide a text-based version of the latest news and stories. Delivered via email, readers can choose stories to read based on their personal preferences and interests.

Maximising the online potential

The online medium has created plenty of opportunities, and has made news gathering simpler, easier, and quicker. What may have been previously impossible, is today easily viable.

For example, Edition 16 carried special reports from 5 students who were in Indonesia as part of QUT Journalism's Internationalisation project (headed by Lee Duffield). The Indonesia Special called, 'Unearthing Indonesia' carries copy, sound and images of Indonesia, including background briefings and a resources page on the Asia Pacific :

<<http://www.communique.qut.edu.au/indepth/indospecial/main.htm>>

Copy/Images was sent across to the QUT-based production team via email, and sound via phone (originally used on 4EB radio). The team had a 3-day turnaround time and compiled a meaty web special (speedy considering student resources), and probably close to impossible on any other medium. It exemplifies convergence and the medium's potential.

Communiqué Online - Our Mission

Communiqué Online's long-term goal is to build a strong, professional team dedicated to achieving best journalistic practice in the Internet medium. We hope to scale new heights and keep updated of the latest trends. We strive to learn new skills and techniques, trial promising software and technological developments whilst maintaining journalistic integrity to publishing in a free and responsible manner without fear or favour.

About the Author

Managing Editor, Nisar Keshvani <<http://www.keshvani.com> - nisar@keshvani.com> is an online journalism lecturer with the School of Media & Journalism, QUT. He has extensive experience as a freelance Internet journalist, web developer, educator and new media specialist. He has been involved with *Communiqué Online* since 1998. That year, he coordinated its production as his final year undergraduate project, winning two awards from the JEA.

In 1999, and 2000 he pioneered and implemented Communiqué Online as a formalised online news production unit. He developed hardware/software support introducing students to essential Computer-Assisted Reporting concepts, web design, image manipulation, Internet, and web content development techniques.

This paper documents the concept and vision behind the QUT School of Media & Journalism's electronic paper and its future directions. Communiqué Online is part of News Production, a 14-week unit offered in Semester Two. It combines the efforts of a group of dedicated third year journalism students who have taken on different roles from writing, sub-editing down to the final layout and HTML design. Portions of this paper were presented at the Journalism Educators Association Conference 2000.

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