

NewsTrust

COMMUNICATIONS

Project Overview

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Summary

NewsTrust offers a compelling new way to find and share good journalism online.

Our nonprofit news service helps people evaluate the quality of their news and information, so they can make more informed decisions as citizens.

Our social news network features a daily feed of news and opinions from mainstream and independent sources, based on ratings from our reviewers. Our web review tools enable people to rate stories for accuracy, fairness, context and other core journalistic principles -- and become more discriminating news consumers in the process. We also rate our reviewers based on performance, to increase the reliability of our reviews and help them grow their media literacy skills.

NewsTrust.net has attracted a growing community of people who share a passion for good journalism, serving over a million unique visitors last year, with over 15,000 registered members, which include concerned citizens, experienced journalists, students and educators.

Our media partners include the Washington Post, the Huffington Post, PBS, PolitiFact, Link TV and Scientific American -- and our educational partners include Stanford University, the University of Santa Clara and the University of Nevada, to name but a few.

NewsTrust's Executive Director is Fabrice Florin, a former journalist and a digital media pioneer at Apple and Macromedia. Our team includes a select group of award-winning journalists, technologists and community organizers -- with advisors such as Dan Gillmor, Craig Newmark, Howard Rheingold and other media innovators from organizations like the Associated Press, Google, the Poynter Institute and Stanford University.

Founded in 2005 and based in Mill Valley, California, NewsTrust is funded through grants and private donations. The MacArthur Foundation is our main funder and has awarded two multi-year grants to support NewsTrust's online credibility service. Other funding sources include Ashoka, Ayrshire Foundation, Mitch Kapor Foundation, Sunlight Foundation and Tides Foundation, as well as Google and private donors such as Craig Newmark (Craigslist) and Doug Carlston (Public Radio International).

Though we are nonprofit, we aim to run a sustainable business, and plan to generate revenue from memberships, sponsorships, licensing and partner services to support this project in coming years.

For more information about NewsTrust, [visit our site](#).

You can contact Executive Director Fabrice Florin at (415) 388-6688 or fab@newstrust.net.

Need

Rapid changes in the news media industry are making it increasingly harder for citizens to find good journalism and to make informed decisions about their lives and governments. The explosion of new media, combined with the consolidation of big media, the rise of amateur journalism, the growth of opinion news and the decline of public trust, are contributing to a range of serious problems such as information overload, misinformation, mistrust and civic apathy. As a result, we see a growing need for an online news evaluation service to help the public find the information they need to participate effectively as citizens in the democratic process.

This need for was identified based on findings from trusted sources such as The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press and the Project for Excellence in Journalism. It was further confirmed in consultation with our advisors (including Dan Gillmor, Craig Newmark, Howard Rheingold and other digital media innovators from organizations like the Associated Press, Google, the Poynter Institute, and Stanford University).

At a time when traditional media are reducing their staffs and trying to do more with less, when new media startups are trying to fill some of the resulting gaps but often lack a framework for journalistic excellence, Americans need a better way to find credible journalism, so they can participate more effectively in our democracy.

NewsTrust offers a practical solution to address this need. Its unique collaborative evaluation process combines reviews from professionals, amateurs and computers to identify quality news and information -- and is designed to help the public gain an appreciation for good journalism.

Solution

NewsTrust offers a powerful new way to find and share good journalism online -- and helps citizens make more informed decisions about their lives and governments. Our nonprofit news service provides quality news and information filters, news literacy tools and a civic engagement network, available to the public 24/7 on the web.

We publish round-the-clock feeds of quality news and opinions from mainstream and independent sources, based on ratings from our reviewers. Our news literacy tools and web review forms enable anyone to rate the news based on quality, rather than popularity -- by evaluating credibility, fairness, evidence, sourcing and other core journalistic principles. This helps citizens tell good journalism apart from misinformation, making them more discriminating news consumers and growing their news literacy skills. To measure their progress and insure the reliability of our feeds, we rate our reviewers based on performance.

NewsTrust partners regularly with media and educational organizations to help their communities find informative and accurate news and information about important public issues. These partnerships bring together experienced journalists, content experts, educators and citizens to review important and relevant stories on a wide range of topics. NewsTrust creates special topic pages on its site and topic widgets for our partner sites, listing related news and opinion from independent and mainstream media, along with ratings from our members. Clicking on a story title opens the website of its original provider, as well as our review form. This review form guides reviewers through careful news evaluations, testing their news literacy and knowledge of related topics, and weighing their ratings accordingly.

Innovation

NewsTrust is the first and only news service to evaluate information quality through a combination of amateur and professional reviews, supported by news literacy tools and computer data analysis. Our innovative evaluation methodology brings together the diverse fields of journalism, content analysis and computer science. We are the first to combine these disciplines into an integrated, effective review process, widely available to the public.

NewsTrust is unique in that it leverages the expertise of professional journalists and amplifies it by training larger groups of citizen volunteers to use our state-of-the-art news review tools. In addition, we also use sophisticated computer algorithms to assess information quality based on core journalistic principles, and weigh member ratings based on their expertise and trust levels.

Our community is organized in different groups, based on trust and experience. Visitors to our site are encouraged to become members, then reviewers. The most active and trusted reviewers are then invited to become hosts, and the best hosts can also become editors. At each step of the way, they are entrusted with more privileges. As members gain trust in our network, their member levels rise and their ratings are weighted accordingly.

Competition

Several news filtering services and organizations are attempting to provide solutions in this space, using a variety of approaches to review and/or organize the news.

We see four primary groups of news sites and aggregators in this space:

- popularity-based sites with no user reviews or editors (e.g., Google News)
- popularity-based sites with user reviews but no editors (e.g., Digg)
- quality-based sites with mostly editor reviews (e.g., FactCheck)
- quality-based sites with both user and editor reviews (e.g., NewsTrust)

Differences between the various news evaluation methods practiced by these sites fall in two primary categories: popularity-based and quality-based news filters. Secondary categories include services relying mostly on computers, amateur reviewers or professional editors to review news quality.

In the popularity filter category, purely automated aggregators like Google News offer a low-cost, but imperfect solution, because they rely primarily on computer intelligence, which is still limited – and they focus on popularity, not information quality. And popularity-based social news networks like Digg and NewsCred are also low-cost, but their listings are often riddled with misinformation, because they rely mostly on vague popularity metrics measured by untrained amateur reviewers, with little expertise and no editorial supervision.

In the quality filter category, editor-led news evaluation services like FactCheck.org provide effective quality filters based on in-depth reviews, but are typically limited in their coverage by the fact that they rely on paid professionals and/or experts, which makes for a costly evaluation process that doesn't scale up.

And news aggregators like AP or Reuters have in-house quality review processes that are also quite effective, but are limited to only their own content. Lastly, partisan media watchdog sites like NewsBusters also provide full reviews by editors, but their quality is questionable, because they are often biased by their own political agenda.

To sum up, here are the key differences between NewsTrust and competing news sites:

- we rate journalistic quality -- not just popularity
- we involve professional journalists and editors to guide our citizen reviewers
- we use multiple ratings – which our research shows are more reliable than single ratings
- we track ratings for each publication in our source reputation database
- we feature stories from our most trusted sources in our daily listings
- reviewers are identified by their real names, not pseudonyms
- we rate our reviewers based on the quality of their work and participation
- our reviewers' ratings are weighted based on their own member level

Independent research by the University of Michigan confirms the reliability of our review process.

Marketing

NewsTrust's marketing efforts are centered on strategic partnerships, public relations campaigns, and viral marketing through word-of-mouth. Our marketing program focuses on driving volume to our site and converting visitors to members and reviewers.

We regularly partner with leading proponents of quality journalism, including media partners that share our values (e.g. PBS, Washington Post), universities (e.g. Stanford), as well as nonprofit organizations. Our partners help build awareness of NewsTrust through a variety of ways, including News Hunts (see next page). They typically feature our top rated news listings and widgets on their sites, as well as our review buttons next to their articles. We have also received a grant from Google for free online advertising and sponsored links, which we are customizing for maximum impact with our search engine optimization program.

In the next stage of deployment in 2010, we plan to form strategic partnerships with large online communities, as well as large mainstream news providers to widen our reach. We will offer them quality news feeds and rating services – as well as useful feedback and community engagement services. In return, they will share traffic and revenue to help support our operations. These partnerships will reach a much broader community, without requiring a large marketing budget.

In a third stage, we will grow our membership through local and international partnerships, as well as a public relations campaign and viral marketing (via Web 2.0 sharing). We have designed NewsTrust as a powerful viral marketing tool that will readily attract new members, as more people review on our site and add their reviews to their social networks.

Partnerships

Partnerships are the primary driver for growing our community and overall traffic.

NewsTrust organizes regular News Hunts for good journalism on important public issues, in partnership with leading news providers and journalism schools. Our partners so far include leading media organizations like the Washington Post, PBS's NewsHour, Scientific American, Huffington Post and the Council on Foreign Relations -- as well as educational organizations like Stanford University, Northeastern, University of Nevada and Arizona State University.

A News Hunt is a bit like a scavenger hunt for quality information. For each News Hunt, we invite our partner communities to join forces with us, and review hundreds of stories in weeklong searches for good journalism on topics like the Economy, the Environment, the Middle East, and Education. Participants typically include news professionals, content experts, concerned citizens, educators and students, all using the NewsTrust review tools for this common quest. At the end of each News Hunt, we collectively recommend the best news coverage on that topic, based on ratings from your community and ours.

Our News Hunts have helped hundreds of thousands of people become more discriminating news consumers this year -- empowering them to make more informed decisions as citizens. By focusing on factual evidence and constructive dialog, we hope NewsTrust can bring Americans closer together -- and broaden their perspective about journalism and democracy.

Here are some of the News Hunts we have organized so far:

- Lobbyists (Washington Post's WhoRunsGov)
- Psychology (Miller-McCune)
- Bad Journalism (University of Santa Clara)
- Health Care (Huffington Post's Eyes & Ears)
- Afghanistan (WNET's WorldFocus)
- Pakistan (Huffington Post and Eyes & Ears)
- Obama's First Hundred Days (PolitiFact and U. of Nevada)
- Black Experience (PBS, Tavis Smiley and U. of Santa-Clara)
- Money (Consumers Union + Stanford)
- Bush Legacy (Washington Post)
- Economy (NewsHour, PBS and University of Nevada)
- Immigration (New America Media)

Our partners typically promote our News Hunts to their communities -- and announce them prominently on their sites, blogs and email newsletters, at the start of each week. Many of them also participate actively as reviewers, submitters and creators of quality journalism on the News Hunt's chosen topic. NewsTrust manages the projects and provides most of the legwork for these News Hunts.

To extend the impact of our News Hunts over time, we invite our partners to add our news widgets on their sites, first to keep score of top rated stories for our News Hunts -- then to extend their news coverage with other related stories from trusted sources. Our partners often add our review buttons next to stories on their sites, to promote their best work and get civil feedback from our reviewers -- based on journalistic quality, not just popularity.

Community

The NewsTrust community has grown steadily since we launched three years ago, attracting a loyal group of concerned citizens, journalists, students and educators, who share a passion for good journalism.

Web Traffic

In the past twelve months, we served over 1.2 million unique visitors through our website and widgets, doubling our numbers to a 2009 average of 110,000 unique visitors per month. Total pageviews also increased by 60%, averaging 368,000 monthly pageviews in 2009.

At the same time, our memberships nearly doubled in just one year, with over 15,000 registered members and 6,000 reviewers, generating an average of 2,400 reviews per month. We expect our community to grow even more in coming months, as we launch new services and sign up larger partners.

NewsTrust Members

NewsTrust members include citizens, journalists, students and educators, who show unusually high levels of education and journalistic experience: about 74% of our members are college graduates, and about 22% have 5 years or more of news experience, according to a recent survey of our member profiles. About 85% of our members live in the United States, 70% are male, and 43% are 50 years or older (young adults 18-34 are the fastest rising demographic segment, growing from 24% last year to 30% of our member survey this year, through our recent partnerships with universities).

A majority of our current members tend to share liberal views, with 58% of our members identifying with political viewpoints on the left (down from 65% last year), 30% on the center (up from 25% last year) and 10% on the right (unchanged). Pew Research confirms that this political distribution is very typical of social networks, which typically attract many more liberals than conservatives. For the past couple years, we have actively tried to recruit more members on the right and center, and hope that upcoming partnerships with the Economist and the Wall Street Journal can help attract more moderates and republicans to our site.

Community Development

NewsTrust organizes regular community activities to help grow our social network: training calls for new members, monthly conference calls with current members, targeted emails for interest groups, surveys for feedback or user-centered design. Our community is organized in different groups, based on trust and experience: visitors to our site are encouraged to become members, then reviewers. The best reviewers are then invited to become hosts, and the most committed hosts can also become editors. This year, we added a new group called newshounds for our most active members. At this time, we have 244 hosts, 22 editors and 18 newshounds. At each step of the way, our members are entrusted with more privileges, based on merit and performance. As members gain trust in our network, their member levels rise and the more their reviews count in our overall ratings. This fall, we introduced new community awards to give members special recognition when they do well. And we plan to offer more community activities such as contests or point-based rewards to grow and retain our community in coming years.

Team

The NewsTrust team had unique expertise in journalism, digital media and online technology.

Fabrice Florin – Executive Director

Fabrice manages creative and business development for NewsTrust. With a 30-year track record in digital media, Fabrice Florin has developed a wide range of leading-edge products and services in the fields of education, entertainment, journalism and technology. Some of his notable accomplishments include: launching popular web entertainment site shockwave.com at Macromedia; pioneering interactive multimedia content and helping launch QuickTime at Apple and creating a new genre of award-winning video journalism for ABC and MTV. Fabrice left a successful career in the commercial media world in 2005 to devote himself full-time to social change. He was recently elected an Ashoka Fellow for his work as a social entrepreneur.

David Fox – Technology Director

David spearheads engineering and web development at NewsTrust and has an extensive background in web and game development. At online community provider LiveWorld/Talk City, David was director of new content, finding and implementing new technologies for this popular community site. Employee #2 at game publisher LucasArts, David was designer, project leader and programmer for a range of computer games, as well as theme park entertainment systems. He also worked as senior game designer at Rocket Science and Xulu Entertainment.

Kaizar Campwala – Associate Editor

Kaizar manages editorial and community activities on our site. Prior to joining NewsTrust, Kaizar was a communications technology consultant to the City of New York. He earned an A.B. in Political Science from Brown University, with a focus on American politics and public access to information.

Subramanya Sastry – Web Engineer

Subramanya is developing new web services for NewsTrust. He's a graduate of the Computer Sciences Department at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Besides his role at NewsTrust, Subramanya also spearheads his own online research service, NewsRack.

Our board members include:

- * Terry Gamble - Ayrshire Foundation
- * Hap Perry - GenStar
- * Kim Spencer - Link TV

Our advisors include:

- * Doug Carlston - Public Radio International
- * David Cohn - Spot.us
- * Kelly Garrett - Ohio State University
- * Dan Gillmor - Arizona State University
- * Jim Kennedy - Associated Press
- * Bill Mitchell - Poynter Institute
- * Craig Newmark - Craigslist
- * Howard Rheingold - Stanford University

Press Quotes

Here's what journalists are saying about NewsTrust:

News literacy training for the public

"Experimental sites like newstrust.net hope to create ratings systems from authorities who evaluate news articles on a range of criteria, and are themselves rated by the raters. (...) Fabrice Florin, the founder of News Trust, said sites like his would be crucial to flagging inaccuracy ... The only long-term hope, he said, was news literacy training for the public, one of New Trust's missions."

New York Times - by Noam Cohen

Promoting well-researched journalism

"Fabrice Florin, executive director of California-based News Trust, said the Internet has led to such a "tsunami of information" that it has become increasingly difficult to sort out well-researched fact from foolishness. "We're dealing with a real issue in democracy," said Florin, whose non-profit group is dedicated to promoting well-researched journalism."

Chicago Tribune - by Bob Sexter

An intriguing experiment

"At NewsTrust, people post links to stories they recommend and then fill out a form to evaluate the story's reliability. These ratings don't just apply to a single story, but are assigned to the news organization (or individual) so that they create a reputation over time."

San Jose Mercury News - Chris O'Brien

From the Daily Me to the Daily We

"If the 'wisdom of the crowds' is to be brought to bear on the news, NewsTrust may point the way. ... Not only can users submit stories and rate them on a variety of criteria, such as importance, sourcing, and fairness, but there are also methods of rating the reliability of news organizations, and even of fellow users."

The Guardian - Dan Kennedy

It Ain't Easy Knowing Who You Can You Trust

"The promise that the Newstrust model presents is that wherever our news search and browsing takes us, we'll see aids that will help us determine the quality of an online news source and ratings of individual stories."

Editor & Publisher - Steve Outing

News the Crowd Can Use

"NewsTrust's Fabrice Florin envisions a process in which established news publications and quality-based social news sites would partner more closely with each other, and leverage each other's expertise to further the public interest."

Wired News - Assignment Zero - Patrick Crawford

Citizens keep watch on the quality of journalism

"Rating with multiple criteria has a curious effect: at first, you're encouraged to read the article more carefully. And when it's time to rate the article, you feel an irresistible need to take a second look at certain sections, to make sure that your verdict will be correct. This invites a more attentive and critical review, making us better readers. "

Le Monde - Francis Pisani

Upholding the sturdy old virtues

"One of interesting things about the NewsTrust initiative is that it has both emergent and conservative ideas built into it. The news judgment of newsroom priests is dethroned. The people formerly known as the audience take over the 'gate,' as it were. But the virtues upheld--accuracy, fairness, evidence, proportion, decency, respect for our intelligence--are the old sturdy ones."

PressThink - Jay Rosen

A fascinating experiment

"NewsTrust.net is one of those eye-opening experiments with social networking that leaves an old newspaper guy shaking his head in awe... To fully appreciate NewsTrust you need to knock around the site. Simply put, this entry into crowd sourcing tries to measure quality of journalism and not the sheer popularity of stories. ... Educationally, the site offers some exciting possibilities."

Walter Cronkite School of Journalism - Tim McGuire

A much-needed effort

"[NewsTrust] is much-needed in our new, loose, distributed media world: They want to answer the question, Whom do we trust? Ratings, reputation, and trust are critically important elements in an open medium where all can and do publish. ... As more people use NewsTrust, its worldview is likely to widen ... lots of you should go to NewsTrust and start rating stories and sources; the more the better."

BuzzMachine - Jeff Jarvis

Web news opposites

"NewsTrust's more thoughtful approach can yield dramatically different top stories. On Tuesday, NewsTrust's users selected "Top Ten Myths About Iraq 2006," from a blog written by Juan Cole, president of the Global Americana Institute. Digg's top story was "50 Reasons -- why it's great to be a Guy!!" from a blog written by someone named Mike in Los Angeles."

San Jose Mercury News - Elise Ackerman

Deeper Than Digg

"The site is looking to judge news articles online by quality, rather than simple popularity, with a more finely grained evaluation of news stories than one gets from the gladiatorial thumbs-up, thumbs-down votes by which stories live and die on Digg. ... NewsTrust, in essence, aims to counter the fascination of the inclusive crowd -- picture Britney Spears on a Linux-based iPod sold by Microsoft -- with the wisdom of the vetted crowd."

InformationWeek - Thomas Claburn

Partner Testimonials

Here's what our partners are saying about NewsTrust:

"A great social news site."

Huffington Post - Arianna Huffington

"The News Hunt team discovered and recommended some important stories within the broad brush of the U.S. economy that we at the NewsHour should focus on, beyond the day-to-day news of the markets and government announcements. In particular, their reviews and recommendations of a series of reports on the struggles of the automakers prompted a specific story on Tuesday's NewsHour. We found the Hunt a source of daily ideas and suggestions, as we continue to cover this complex and unfolding story."

NewsHour with Jim Lehrer - Lee Banville

"One of the goals of Engage is to promote civic engagement, and these news hunts provide the PBS audience a way to get involved and help promote quality journalism on important civic issues."

PBS Engage - Jayme Swain

"I was thrilled with the results of 'news hunt' that we co-sponsored with NewsTrust. I was particularly impressed with the ability of the NewsTrust community to filter out the noise of the 24-hour news cycle and to identify good work where it existed. NewsTrust is truly an important innovation in the Web 2.0 world."

Council on Foreign Relations - Mike Moran

"It's hard to think of another site quite like NewsTrust ... The fact that they are a non-profit whose only agenda is gathering quality news is probably the secret to their success -- in terms of integrity and objectivity, I can't think of a source I'd trust more."

Scientific American - Christopher Mims

"NewsTrust provides new ways for journalists to see what people are saying about their work. It lets users review content for journalistic value."

The Poynter Institute - Ellyn Angelotti

"NewsTrust.net helps citizens make informed decisions about our democracy by making it easier to find good journalism online. Each day the non-profit, non-partisan group features a selection of articles and opinion pieces that its members rate for fairness, accuracy, context and sourcing."

Sunlight Foundation - Ellen Miller

Advisor Testimonials

Here's what our advisors are saying about NewsTrust:

"The guys from NewsTrust are building something new, tools that help people find trustworthy news. Their technology allows everyone to work together to rate and filter the news, and figure out what's fair and factual. ... I believe in what these guys are doing, and have contributed my time and money."

Craig Newmark - Craigslist

"I believe strongly in NewsTrust because citizen involvement in returning public trust to journalism is so important to the future of democracy."

Howard Rheingold - Stanford University

"The potential of this approach is terrific: community involvement in understanding how well journalists -- including bloggers -- do at their jobs (whether it's a professional or amateur activity or something in between). Clearly, this is an early iteration. But the promise is clear. Join up and help out."

Dan Gillmor – Arizona State University

"NewsTrust will help build trust online, because its protocol and interactivity are programmed correctly -- to uphold principles and promote transparency -- maintaining journalism standards as the vast, global migration looks to the Web as the primary venue for news."

Michael Bugeja - Iowa State University

"Newstrust addresses in a nonpartisan way the dearth of thoughtful discourse in this country by presenting a model of "citizen journalism" that can be easily accessed, utilized and scaled up by its participants in the way that Amazon, eBay and Craigslist have been. As a parent and a citizen of this country, I am longing for ways to educate our children and each other to discern fact from fiction, truth from 'truthiness'."

Terry Gamble - Ayrshire Foundation

"At a time when corporate profit demands are increasing the commercial bias of mainstream news -- more of what people can be seduced to want and less of what they need -- and when most news on the web is produced by neojournalists of uncertain competence, News Trust is an invaluable guide to quality."

John McManus - Grade The News

"There are lots of smart individuals in the world but none as smart, experienced or insightful as all of us together. NewsTrust provides a tool for applying the wisdom of the crowd of news consumers to the news-gathering and communication process. ."

Mark Tapscott - Washington Examiner / Heritage Foundation

Member Testimonials

Here's what our members are saying about NewsTrust:

"I've become a much more discerning news reader after having rated articles on the NewsTrust site. As I read news articles elsewhere, I find myself noting how many and what sources are used and what kind of language is employed."

Peggy Kruse - Founding Member - Florissant, MO

"NewsTrust lets me make my own personal contribution to the Fourth Estate, not by writing more news but by helping to find the gems already out there, drowning in a sea of information. None of us has the time to consume more than a fraction of 'all the news that is news.' But with NewsTrust we can help ourselves and each other to find good journalism."

Mike LaBonte - Haverhill, MA

"NewsTrust is an excellent tool for finding reliable sources and sharpening my own analytical skills. The review process helps me evaluate content and quality more effectively, see beyond my own opinions, and become better informed about vital issues."

Marsha Iverson - Seattle, WA

"NewsTrust is one of the most useful ideas I've seen in a long time. The rating system is on-target and relevant, which makes it easy to find the stories that I'm interested in. And I always find pieces that I would have missed on other sites. Great idea, great implementation."

John Taylor - Moraga, CA

"When I tried to do my first review, to my great and unpleasant surprise, I discovered that my overall impression of an article is much more defined by my prejudices than by what's indeed written there."

Hans Suter - Milano, Italy

"I love NewsTrust for its accessibility, diversity and its grass-root nature. I get to evaluate stories good and bad, and then hear what people with different background and experience think of the same stories. We may vehemently disagree with each other, but I learn a lot from what others think."

Lewyn Li - Boston, MA

"NewsTrust is now a valued part of my daily routine. I know that readers concerned about quality journalism are constantly posting worthwhile new articles, and commenting on their strengths and shortcomings, the better to encourage critical reading from fellow readers - and citizens. An engaged community, aided by a sophisticated and easy-to-use interface, is what makes NewsTrust unique."

Warren Keith Wright - Missouri