

How has your literary org changed over the past 5-10 years due to technology changes?

BOMB launched a basic HTML website in 2000, featuring partial content from the current issue only. This helped to increase exposure to BOMB's mission: to deliver the artist's voice through carefully developed interviews between visual artists, writers, filmmakers, actors, and musicians. However, at that time we had no way to sell subscriptions online, except by referring people to a phone number and to newsstand retailers. Our resources were limited back then, and most grants and private donations were funneled back into printing and overhead costs for our quarterly publishing operations. Staff size was approximately 4.5 people—primarily comprised of editors—and most were considered part-timers.

It wasn't until 2005 that we really began to strategize e-commerce solutions for driving online subscriptions and back issue sales, and also for delivering past and current content. Since that time, we have completely reconceptualized BOMB's entire web presence to include a radically restructured website running Ruby on Rails web server, using a MySQL database, that contains a near-complete online archive of BOMB's 28-years of interviews.

The BOMB Digital Archive, made possible in part by grants from NYSCA, the Warhol Foundation, and private donations, is a three-year digitization project that will be completed by the end of 2009. In addition to the Archive, BOMB has been pursuing several new online initiatives over the last three years made possible by new media technologies, including a streaming BOMBLive video series; downloadable podcast features; photo galleries of parties and live events; web-exclusive interviews and conversations; and regular e-blasts that promote new content and programming. Most importantly, we now have a clearly visible subscription and back issue sales option that has increased revenue substantially, and we have plans underway for a more formal shopping cart model.

About a year ago, BOMB launched a blog, BOMBlog, which has allowed us to reach a younger and more widespread demographic than ever, especially students, through programs like BOMB.edu. As opposed to the long-form interview format for which BOMB is famous, BOMBlog features short, pithy Q&A's, reviews, round-ups, photo essays, original poetry and fiction, and regular event listings curated by BOMB staff. Built into the fabric of the blog is an option to comment on and discuss articles so as to encourage discussion among our readers, inviting them to join in on the conversation that is at the core of BOMB's mission.

In addition, through third-party licenses with such companies as JSTOR, Project MUSE, and the Copyright Clearance Center, BOMB's content will now be accessible at university and institution libraries throughout the world via private database companies, who pay BOMB modest annual royalties. We are currently exploring other ways to monetize BOMB's content using e-publishing platforms through Kindle and other e-book reading devices, an iphone application, and digital facsimile editions of the magazine.

BOMB regularly partners with key organizations, via cross-linking, digital ad trades, and content sharing; these relationships complement our own distribution methods by pushing our content online virally to areas that we have yet to penetrate. Finally, BOMB makes full use of social

networking sites to broadcast its message, with a robust presence on Facebook, Twitter, and its own Youtube Channel. BOMB is now a 10-person large organization, with 8 interns on rotating days per semester. Our ability to grow the brand online has increased exponentially in a very short period of time.

What do you feel new technologies offer you a chance to do that you could not before? What do you wish you could do, if you had limitless resources?

The advent of new technologies has allowed BOMB to broadcast our mission of delivering the artist's voice across multiple channels and through different mediums. Whereas before we only delivered the artists voice within a print magazine and primarily through the medium of text, we are now able to explore a fuller range of media for disseminating our content, from streaming video conversations, to podcasts of interviews, to 140-character tweets of interest for our fans and followers to appreciate. BOMB content is now available to a greater number of people, as well as a greater variety of users, who might not otherwise have encountered BOMB in print, but who prefer to receive their content in audio, video, or mobile technology formats.

Given additional, or limitless, resources, BOMB would provide the most complete picture possible of its 28-year legacy for free as an online open-access model for content sharing. This would require full-time technical support, which we don't currently possess, and the purchase of additional hardware like computers, scanners, recording equipment, and state-of-the-art software applications. This would allow us, for example, to make full PDFs of past issues available online and for download too, to better illustrate the vintage layouts from the '80s and '90s. We would also expand our video series and push it into the broadcast television realm, through cable programming or such sites as hulu.com <<http://hulu.com>> and babelgum.com <<http://babelgum.com>> . We would increase production of our podcast audio series and venture into internet radio, featuring a variety artists & writers in conversation. We would launch the BOMB Oral Histories Project with a dedicated staff to coordinate, record, transcribe, and edit transcripts. With limitless resources, we would expand our range of partners we work with to ensure that BOMB's content reaches the widest possible audience, becoming a content provider for other websites, blogs, and organizations where appropriate. This would entail research, outreach, and strategic planning with additional full-time staff leading the charge...resources we currently lack.

What are the challenges you have faced, and expect to face in the future, in terms of technology?

There has been a steep learning curve as we get up to speed with new technologies and what they can do for us. We are still very much a small staff, most of whom are artists and writers in our spare time who come from traditional print (i.e., analog) publishing environments. The language of new media technology is not our lingua franca. But as we learn the value of going digital everyday, we appreciate the democratization of information that we're witnessing. In keeping with our mission to deliver the artist's voice, we understand that BOMB's content will be of the greatest value if it can be accessed online for free worldwide.

Our biggest obstacles include limited resources and few full-time staff. With the example of our Digital Archive, we have relied on unpaid interns, enthusiastic and committed students and recent grads, to help scan, OCR, code, and proofread past interview content for the web. The

learning curve for the technological processes is high, and interns invariably move on, so we find ourselves in training mode frequently, which slows our progress. As we gear up to tackle e-books and iPhone apps, for instance, we're facing the dilemma of whether we will be able to afford to pursue these initiatives just to test the market, with no guarantee of success. We need to be very focused with how we spend our time, and on what, so as not to be stretched too thin. As a result, we cannot pursue some of the more exciting and innovative avenues until other projects have been completed, and even then we may find them too cumbersome to tackle given our limited means.

What other literary orgs do you feel use technology most successfully, and how?

We like what the Paris Review does with their site, as well as The Believer. Several of our peers' e-blast newsletters are smartly configured, like A Public Space's. We're big fans of Stephen Elliot's The Rumpus, and the new McSweeney's iPhone app is a great model for us in thinking about this possibility. We partner with the Academy of Americas Poets and PEN America, and we're happy that content and link sharing is so seamless with these organizations.

How do you see the literary landscape in 10-20 years from now, given the possibilities that technology is opening up for us. How do you think technology might specifically effect literary orgs?

More and more, we are seeing that readers no longer necessarily head to websites for their content; the content is now coming to them through RSS feeds, PDAs, Audible/iTunes, etc. Likewise, people are not going to bookstores, preferring instead to order online. The novelty of attending a reading or panel or staged conversation has worn off, aided by the pervasiveness of podcasts that offer recordings of these same events, without the need for tickets or crowds. With the advent of smart phones and other mobile technologies, people are reading on the go more than ever. The result is an ever-discerning, harder-to-reach audience, one that may well end up having a shorter attention span and which will not be satisfied with a just a text-based experience. They will be expecting multimedia to complement, or replace, what was once a text-dominated industry.

Literary orgs will have to adapt to this lifestyle change, finding ways to promote their missions and their content to audiences with inventive solutions that anticipate this trend. A decline in traditional "reading" does not have to mean a drop-off in interest in literature, however. Literary organizations will need to work together in the future, supporting each others' efforts by partnering on new projects. As more content is created, and as the access to more information increases, readers will be looking for trusted, reliable filters to help them make choices. That's where we as literary organizations come in. Lits orgs, independent publishers, etc. will have to step up and strengthen their identities, refining their editorial choices, ensuring that readers understand their curatorial tastes. In this way, technology will keep us all more focused in our efforts to support arts and culture.

On 10/5/09 5:03 PM, "Rob Casper" <rob@poetrysociety.org <<http://rob@poetrysociety.org>> > wrote:

Dear all,

I'm Rob Casper, the Programs Director at the Poetry Society of America. I've volunteered to do a blog for the upcoming LITTAP Convening, which will introduce the event by posting responses from you, our featured speakers. So, if you wouldn't mind taking a second to respond to these questions sometime this week, I'll post them up!

1. How has your literary org changed over the past 5-10 years due to technology changes?
2. What do you feel new technologies offer you a chance to do that you could not before? What do you wish you could do, if you had limitless resources?
3. What are the challenges you have faced, and expect to face in the future, in terms of technology?
4. What other literary orgs do you feel use technology most successfully, and how?
5. How do you see the literary landscape in 10-20 years from now, given the possibilities that technology is opening up for us. How do you think technology might specifically effect literary orgs?

Thanks so much, Rob

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