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THE BROWSER:

Analyzing the tech biz
By the FORTUNE technology staff



March 22, 2007

You report. We decide. (And try to sell you stuff.)

The big television networks are all jumping on the video "citizen journalism" craze. But are they just interested in what the amateurs have to say?

The trendlet started at the end of last year when Yahoo (YHOO) launched [You Witness News](#), which it heavily promotes on its super-earnest [Kevin Sites in the Hot Zone](#) channel.

Now Fox News is weighing in with [uReport](#), a segment on Studio B with Shepard Smith. The best submissions, the site says, will be aired on television. And just this week Katie Couric at CBS started inviting [prospective interns](#) to upload samples of their work; the public is invited to critique the students' submissions. (Talk about low-cost labor: CBS posts content from Katie wannabes, who obviously won't receive remuneration for their "applications." Oh, and if they are lucky enough to get an internship? Well, that's unpaid, too.)

But really, CBS, FOX and the others aren't doing this for the free newsgathering help. They are hoping to win users' loyalty to their online news sites, and, eventually market all kinds of products and services to them. To the delight of the news sites' parent companies, every would-be citizen journalist has to volunteer various pieces of personal information with every posting: In almost all cases, an e-mail address is required, but some news groups also want a zip code or even a birthdate. All that information, plus the content submitted, can then be culled and analyzed. "We understand how to take large volumes of data in all its forms and enable our customers to shape it," says Kim Patrick Kobza, CEO and president of an outfit called Neighborhood America, which powers uReport, Couric's "Springboard" internship site and ABC's new [Be Seen, Be Heard](#) campaign.

In a meeting with The Browser, Kobza explained that Neighborhood America helps companies set up the equivalent of social networks, sort of MySpace for the Fortune 500 set, only instead of "friends" companies have customers. By creating these communities, Kobza says, companies can get user feedback and improve their products, services and brands. They also get to collect data on scores of customers and potential customers, and for news sites, that certainly means an ability to sell even more targeted advertising.

But what of the content posted on these sites? Are amateur-produced news segments any good? As of this morning, only [one brave soul](#) had posted a print story on CBS's internship site, and his piece earned a paltry 2 star rating out of a possible 5, proving what most bloggers already know: The Web is a harsh place.

Filed under [online media](#), [CBS](#), [social media](#), [Fox](#), [television](#)
Posted by stephaniemehta 12:25 pm 1 Comment

Overall, I believe that most people still prefer to receive their news from a professional source rather than amateurs.

But as you and others have mentioned before, the networks aren't doing all this for the amateurs. The networks are just trying to cash-in on the YouTube model; build their internet advertising base; and winning more customer loyalty. However, if amateurs and interns happen to benefit from all this, then kudos to them!

Posted By Peter Hooper, Greensboro, NC : 12:49 pm

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