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Computers as an essential tool

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Avenger of the wronged, illuminator of the corrupt. Exposer of the past, analyst of the present, harbinger of the future. Conscience of those governing, consciousness of those governed.

Bolch (1978: 1)

Introduction

And that is just for starters. In truth, the investigative reporter comes in all sorts of guises. To many, the male version is little different from the trench coat-wearing private investigators of detective fiction - the Philip Marlowes, the Sam Spades - fearless men who walked down mean streets in pursuit of truth and justice. These days, it might be smarter, safer, quicker - certainly a lot drier - for an investigator to stay indoors and let a computer do the leg work.

Not every investigative reporter will crack a Watergate. Yet many would agree with Greenwald's definition of the investigative reporter's goals - namely, "to bring about positive change in existing laws or to expose wrongdoing" (2000, 4). Certainly the renown of the Watergate investigation, enhanced by the film where movie stars portrayed its reporter/investigator pair as heroes, persists. After all, the notion that two reporters could "weave wisps of information into a rope strong enough to snare the President of the United States, is heady stuff, imbuing with glamour a field more characterised by patient drudgery" (Bolch 1978, 1).

Yes, drudgery, however unglamorous, is the real basis of investigative reporting. Journalists allied with the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) (<http://www.icij.org/>) examined more than 11,000 pages of documents to write the story of how tobacco companies had secretly encouraged tax evasion and cigarette smuggling in a global effort to secure market share and lure generations of new smokers (Beelman 2000; see also Birnbauer case study for a detailed examination of this story). According to Bolch (1978, 2), investigative reporting differs from routine reporting "mainly in degree of thoroughness. While all reporting utilizes the same basic tools (questions, interviews, research), these weapons are wielded more skilfully for an investigative piece".

Computers in reporting

Also being wielded is that newest addition to the journalist's arsenal - the computer. While it will not replace the others, it increasingly facilitates them. Along with telephone or face-to-face interviews, journalists increasingly conduct email interviews. Research may be done in a library or through an intermediary, but reporters are also going online themselves to get information from Web sites or to search for facts or background. Even the humble interview question may be refined in a word processing program. In addition, some journalists have been using computers for years to write their stories, tap wire services and edit copy. The more computer-savvy among

them have also used computers to crunch numbers, build databases, or interrogate online services. So what makes computers suddenly so important in investigative reporting? Modems.

The Internet has brought everything together. Now a journalist can research a story, interview contacts, interrogate databases, do deep background, write copy, send it - even from the back of beyond. All that's needed is a computer equipped with a modem. It's not science fiction. As Garrison says:

Online news research, reporting using online commercial services and the Internet, and news stories based on original database analysis by reporters are no longer ideas of future newsgathering. They are here. They are in use (1995b, 16).

They are, but not everywhere. According to Fulton:

... given that personal computers have already been around for more than a decade, it's shameful how slowly we're still moving to take advantage of the new tools for reporting, thinking, communicating and telling stories. The nation's newsrooms are full of reporters and editors who have no idea how to mine the vast resources of the online world - much less how to prepare themselves to produce journalism for interactive, multimedia formats. It's as though a whole generation of journalists and journalism educators secretly believe that they'll be able to retire before having to relearn their jobs (1999, 169).

Even in the US, Garrison says that computer-assisted reporting (CAR) in most newsrooms "...began with a computer enthusiast who also happened to be a reporter or an editor" (1995b, 16). Newsrooms in Australia generally have been slow to adopt CAR at either the basic or deep levels, according to Quinn (1997). Once demonstrated, CAR generally wins converts among news executives because of its ability to produce exclusives, stories that come "out of the blue". However, in many Australian newsrooms, some journalists still do not have computers with Web and email access at their own desktops. To use such tools, many have to visit the in-house library - if they are lucky enough to have one - where they may have to wait their turn to use online facilities.

Computer-assisted reporting and investigative reporting are not the same thing. Yet the smart investigative reporter - even the astute general reporter - will want to learn all about the tools the CAR journalist uses. They save time. They extend reach. They assist analysis and tracking of names and phrases. They can reveal gradual changes in society and politics. As Rosenberg (1991, 1) says, newspapers that embrace CAR "can not only lend depth and breadth to news stories but may also be able to spot local trends or patterns over time, across locations or among individuals or groups". CAR should not be seen as a magic bullet, warns Nora Paul of the US Poynter Institute. CAR "makes a good reporter better but it won't make a bad reporter good ... But it is work that can find and tell stories that you couldn't find and tell otherwise" (*Nerds* 1999, 3).

Finding stories that can't be told otherwise is what investigative reporting is all about. And of course, many good investigative stories have been researched and written without the benefit of computers. Through painstaking research, good interviewing, luck and hard work, major news stories have been broken time and time again by journalists. So why should a journalist bother learning a whole new set of skills? What will they add? What can they do?

According to Koch (1991, 70), the Internet and other databases "provide the potential for the typical journalist to develop, story by story and issue by issue, criteria for evaluating the statements of their sources". This can then enable journalists "to ask better and deeper questions and give them the chance to validate and challenge information from sources". Quinn (1999, 49) agrees. "Technology is not a panacea that will transform the news into a reasonably objective social service. But technology can free journalists from frequent reliance on the limited views voiced by specific experts and officials". Computers may become even more important as politicians, CEOs and other public figures stop talking to journalists directly or seek to provide information only through a smokescreen of spin or through the mediation of public relations spokespeople. As Jack Waterford, managing editor of the *Canberra Times*, notes:

When he [Australian Prime Minister John Howard] speaks to journalists at all, it is usually in controlled doorstep interviews, in which he rattles off some pre-prepared line for the broadcast media and does not submit himself to questions. And he goes on to talkback radio, where he can speak directly to his audience without having his words twisted by or interpreted by a journalist ... the print journalists who are reporting him are confined to picking up and quoting from the transcripts issued by his office, and, perhaps, weighing the spin placed upon it by his retinue against the spin placed upon it by his enemies (1999, 3).

In such circumstances, computer-assisted research - examining documents, speeches, transcripts, earlier statements, and making comparisons - may be the only way a journalist can get a story.

Using computers in reporting makes sense in every way. It allows a journalist to tap into resources anywhere, to transcend the limitations of geography, time zones or limited in-house resources. In an increasingly wired world, there are so many things that can't be done - foreign reporting, number-crunching, statistical analysis - without computers.

Annabel Colley, researcher for the BBC's investigative *Panorama* program, says, "I don't know how I ever managed without the Internet for programs like this" (quoted in Hane 2001, 202). Speaking of research for a Kosovo program, she explains:

What's really great now is that a source like BBC News Online, or any of the big news sites like CNN, or the Institute of War and Peace Reporting, will have Kosovo special pages. They'll have the key players, and they'll have biography and background for key figures, as well as chronologies, timelines, angles, and issues ... Before, I would photocopy masses and masses of hard copy press cuttings from the library, with all the different little angles that we might need for this program.

With so much information newly available, many journalists are beginning to worry about drowning in a sea of it. This can best be avoided by the three Fs - Find, Filter and File. Computers are exceptionally good at organising data. Journalists should also strive to be organised. As renowned American muckraker Jessica Mitford (1988, 18) says, organisation is "all-important; here is where an article does or does not come together". A few years down the track, when a journalist begins to investigate a topic anew, she may be glad she carefully saved and filed all the background, news clippings, articles, press releases, contacts and facts and figures gathered earlier on that same subject as it will provide a solid research platform to use again.

Time-saving is an important factor in the new information climate. Having access to the very latest material online, including transcripts, reports and breaking news, means reporters out in the field can perform at a much higher investigative level than before. There is much that a reporter can do personally to save time. If a journalist is on a fishing expedition, the one-to-many approach of email means he can have more than one line in the water at a time. He can send ten, a hundred, even a thousand emails with the same ease (and for the same cost) as one. Each one that provokes a response is a win. Journalists' questions are not buried in a pile of handwritten messages; rather they wait until recipients log on and are ready to answer. The journalist can pursue other aspects of the story while those baits are doing their job - he is not tied to a desk, waiting for a phone to ring, or spending time driving to a destination to talk to someone in person. The endless toing and froing and time wasting of telephone tag is eliminated. It can all be done from the desktop. The reporter can work away at other angles of the story, or on another story altogether, while waiting for replies to come in. A journalist can also now request information via email from experts lists such as XpertNet in Australia (mail to xpertnet@ocs1.ocs.mq.edu.au) or ProfNet (<http://www.profnet.com/>) in the USA. This widens a journalist's sources and contacts.

Reach is enormously extended once Internet-enabled computers are used. The email interview, while it may have drawbacks - a journalist cannot break in with a question or suddenly change tack - can reach people who may have been inaccessible before for any number of reasons - because they live in diametrically opposed time zones, which can make contact tricky, because the reporter did not know about them until alerted to them by expert lists, or because they live in geographically remote areas that may have been too costly to call by telephone. Email, which sits and waits for recipients to log on, can be read in the interviewees' day time, and answered while

they are fresh. The reporter then turns up for work to find his inbox is full. He has everything he needs, in writing, a permanent record - there can now be no denying of quotes, no "off-the-record". He can even cut and paste sections of the email into a story with less chance of getting quotes or spellings wrong.

The Web provides access to material that might have been difficult to get before. Reports from remote organisations, the full text of legislation, trade figures, global statistics, TV and radio news broadcasts, press releases—much of this material is now online and, in many cases, archived and searchable. Journalists may believe that material in the public domain can contain nothing of real significance, but this is not always true. For example, many bankrupt people in Australia defy the law by opening bank accounts or taking on company directorships even though the public record of their bankruptcy is available online in the National Personal Bankruptcy database (via CITEC Confirm <http://www.confirm.com.au/>) to anyone willing to pay the necessary search fee. As Anderson says:

A surprising number of journalists are of the opinion that nothing genuinely derogatory can be found in records available to the public ... most corrupt persons ... feel they are fairly safe ... that with all the crooks in the world the press won't take the time to come after them (1976, 65).

Meticulous combing of routine sources or reports, such as statistical reports from the UN and its agencies or government documents, can also pay off. Quite controversial or newsworthy information may well be hidden in plain sight. A report may be made widely available in the hope that its very ubiquity will ensure that it is ignored by journalists who generally expect explosive material or leaks to appear in a secretive manner. Also, some matters of interest to investigative reporters may simply be hidden from public view, and not by any "deliberate intent to conceal", as DeFleur (1997, 18) says. Rather, the information "may be difficult to uncover simply because it is obscured in a large reel of magnetic tape or is otherwise 'hidden' by the nature of records rather than improper intent alone." The changeover by governments from paper files to electronic record keeping has changed the way investigative reporters need to examine the ways that government bodies function. DeFleur goes on to say:

Today, if they want to exercise their watchdog function, journalists often have to make use of sophisticated new computer technologies and complex strategies of analysis of digital information that were never a part of the more traditional approach of the past (1997, 18).

Thom Cookes, a reporter for the Melbourne *Age*, would agree that many of the organisations and people journalists report on are now keeping records electronically. This poses new problems for reporters who are not computer-literate. "Sometimes there is no paper document to be FOI'd or leaked. Government is scrutinising itself. - and is being scrutinised by others - with the aid of computers and we should be learning to do the same" (quoted in Quinn 1997, 136). Computers can give a journalist more control, making him less reliant on other people for information. Being able to scrutinise electronic documents in their entirety or to search for words or names within them, hands control back to the journalist. Access is not being mediated by another person such as a librarian, public servant or public relations officer. As Brant Houston of the US National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting says (1996, 5):

A good journalist wants to see original documents or exact copies of those documents. Every time you let someone else select or sort those documents, you risk letting someone else add a spin or bias that can't be detected.

Paul Adrian says computer-assisted reporting lets you "hold officials' feet to the fire. When they dismiss your question by saying, 'That one just fell through the cracks,' you can come back at them and say, 'Actually we looked at the records and found 46 more examples of the same thing'" (quoted in *Nerds* 1999, 12).

It would also be worthwhile for journalists to keep regular track of government or NGO consultancies and audits in their round or beat. As Anderson (1976, 45-6) says: "Every now and then some public agency decides to hire an outside consultant to check its efficiency. If the consultant reports back that the agency has been doing a good job, a press release is issued. If the

consultant says the agency was wasteful, inefficient, stupid, lazy and criminally negligent, nothing is said." So no report can be news, especially if large sums of money were wasted on consulting fees that produced no published outcome. It may be possible for reporters to gain leaked copies of consultants' work to check for any startling facts or recommendations.

Using computers in journalism can provide access to people, stories, ideas and documents previously unknown or inaccessible. Many traditional sources of information such as libraries or printed indexes have moved on from paper-based systems to computerised records, thus becoming out of reach for anyone who cannot or will not learn to use a computer. And libraries are of great use to reporters, as Chris Masters, journalist for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's investigative program, *4 Corners*, attests. "I always say the heart of any good story is good research. Good research comes first of all from the library" (quoted in Fogg 1994, 5). Mitford believes the gathering of extensive background information is crucial to any investigative piece. "The goal is to know, if possible, *more* about your subject than the target of the investigation does" (1988, 5).

Many libraries now have computerised catalogues. The early Telnet connections (text only, no mouse) have been replaced in many cases with Web catalogues which include graphics and easy online help. The widening of search options to include keyword searches improves even a novice's chances of finding material. Computers can sift through thousands of records in seconds to retrieve the one or two items matching an inquiry. A journalist wanting to use the library catalogues of large state or university libraries would soon discover that there is no alternative to computerised searching. The card catalogue is dead. Even public libraries are installing computerised catalogues.

The National Library of Australia hosts the Australian Libraries Gateway (<http://www.nla.gov.au/libraries/>) which makes all computerised Australian library catalogues available from one Web site. A few more clicks and you can search catalogues at the universities of Oxford or Harvard or the Library of Congress. That is a huge step forward for journalists and researchers. Instead of having to visit a library to look for material, a journalist can call up most library catalogues from a computer, look for what she wants, and move on to another source if she cannot find it. And all from her own desk, which saves time. She might have made the trip to the library if the required information seemed compelling enough, but she might not have, simply for lack of time, and her story might have been poorer for it.

Utilising the four Rs

Nora Paul (cited in Quinn 1997, 133) divides reporting into four sections - what she calls the 4Rs - rendezvous, research, reference, and reporting. She says all four are critical to information gathering. While they *can* be done without a computer, computers can speed up the job and expand the range of both sources and contacts.

Rendezvous

Computer-assisted rendezvous obviously involves email contacts and interviewing, but it can also involve participation in Internet newsgroups, mailing lists and Web forums or trawling their archives in search of words, phrases, personal or brand names. The development of search tools such as Google Groups (<http://groups.google.com/>) for newsgroups simplify this kind of work. Without computer knowledge and Internet access, a journalist would have no access to this type of material.

Research

The sheer volume of available online information can be daunting for journalists more used to dealing with human sources of information. Yet, offline behaviour can easily be adapted to online if common sense prevails. Journalists do not need computer or Internet knowledge so much as knowledge about the way the world works, and about where information comes from (Weaver, 2000). Even in the new world of the Internet, the key questions are what they've always been:

- What are you actually looking for?
- Who is likely to have the information?

Once you can answer these questions, you can begin to look for a source. In the old days, the answer to a factual inquiry might have been in a reference book - a Whitaker's Almanack, or a UN statistical yearbook. These days it is more likely to be found in a web site, an online database, a government web site or that of an organisation or association. It all depends on the question. Certainly, governments, educational institutions, businesses and organisations of all types publish hugely online. As Bolch (1978, 49) says: "No matter whether you're interested in the possible threats posed by tobacco or nuclear energy, cable TV or auto insurance laws, there is most likely an organisation or association devoted to promoting or investigating that particular subject". Such associations not only investigate matters, but also actively push information to others who also may be interested in the topic. For the investigative reporter, these are very useful contacts, which provide excellent, ever-ready sources.

Research can be tremendously augmented by the use of web search tools, which can pinpoint sites listing particular names or words regardless of who has published them. A computer's ability to perform keyword searches across millions of documents greatly extends a journalist's range of information sources. However, journalists new to the Internet should not jump straight on to search engines to find information.

You could use search engines to try find ... things, but (a) the link returns are too jumbled, (b) the top links (which are probably all you'd want to look at) may be worthless, (c) there's no guarantee that you will find what you want and (d) it takes too long to work out whether you can trust what you find (Weaver 2000).

A better approach is to research your topic as you would offline, that is, try to identify what kind of organisation would be likely to produce the information you need. For example:

If someone asks me for, say, information on genetically-modified food, I think CSIRO. The Federal Government would also have information. Female circumcision - that's a human rights issue - what about trying Amnesty International or other human rights organisations? Digital TV and datacasting - I'd try the Australian Broadcasting Authority and also the government for latest news, press releases and so on. Tourism numbers - the ABS [Australian Bureau of Statistics], obviously. Reconciliation - I'd try ATSIC [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission] and the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation. The latest on Kosovo? I'd look at BBC news archives, online Balkan newspapers and possibly the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (Weaver 2000).

Margot Williams, research editor for the *Washington Post*, endorses such an approach. In the early days of the Internet, she says:

... you had to know the provenance in order to find anything - but that's still a good way of thinking about it ... think about where it [the information] has always been available in the physical, real world ... the best way, the most economical way, to search is to know either what *kind* of place you want, or how to *find* the best place to look for it. This is why I'm so adamant about using subject sites and not just going out into cyberspace on a whim (Hane 2001, 86-7).

For example, when searching for demographic information, journalists should look first at statistical organisations, such as the Australian Bureau of Statistics, which may already have posted the information online. Journalists can search for such bodies through existing Web directories such as Governments on the WWW (<http://www.gksoft.com/govt/en/>) or Associations on the Net (<http://www.ipl.org/ref/AON/>).

Another approach is to use the excellent subject guides to hundreds of topics that already exist on the Web. "A lot of librarians out there have done a huge job in organising, listing and annotating resources" (Weaver 2000). Many of the pages have been put together by experts or enthusiasts - it's worth following in the footsteps of these gifted amateurs. Try The World Wide Web Virtual Library (<http://vlib.org/Overview.html>), Librarians' Index to the Internet (<http://lii.org/>), Pinakes (<http://www.hw.ac.uk/libWWW/irn/pinakes/pinakes.html>), and BUBL (<http://www.bubl.ac.uk/>).

Reference

Reference services - traditionally the job of libraries - have also set up shop in cyberspace, made possible by the power of computers and the Net. Journalists can check facts in a range of authoritative online tools. These include the *CIA World Factbook* (<http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html>) or the annual reports of large non-government organisations. Add to that the plethora of online dictionaries (including foreign language dictionaries) for spell-checking and pronunciation, grammar and style guides, books of quotations, online translation services such as AltaVista's Babelfish, currency converters, and the AskAnExpert services that accept email enquiries - all of which a journalist can use without leaving the desk.

Reporting

Quinn (1997, 133) describes computer-assisted reporting as "going online to access large electronic databases". Many of these databases, previously only available via subscription, have moved on to the Net, and many, for example MEDLINE via PubMed (<http://www.pubmed.gov/>), Agricola (<http://www.nal.usda.gov/ag98/>), ERIC (<http://www.ericae.net/search.htm>) and PubSCIENCE (<http://pubsci.osti.gov/>), are now searchable free of charge. The US Government also has a database, the GrayLit Network (<http://www.osti.gov/graylit/>) which enables users to find hard-to-trace information without first having to know which government agency produced it. Australian Public Affairs Information Service, the main news and current affairs database for Australia, is still available in print, but for how long? Bibliographic databases such as these identify new academic publishing, and thus can be used to track cutting edge research in a whole range of fields. Once armed with an academic's name, or the name of a university or research centre, journalists can make contact with these previously unknown sources or experts who can then be tapped for news and views.

In addition, the Web hosts a range of other types of electronic databases - statistical, archival, photographic, judicial and legislative, for example the AUSTLII archive of Australian legislation (<http://www.austlii.edu.au/>) or the World Health Organisation's WHOSIS statistical database (<http://www.who.int/whosis/>). Journalists would once have been locked out of these services, either by cost or by geography. Now the Web is changing that. Not all these services are free, but the wide range of services and their growing accessibility through the World Wide Web makes them a crucial tool for journalists.

The Invisible Web

How do researchers find them? Most of these databases come under the umbrella of the Invisible Web. The Invisible Web is that section of the Net that the search engines cannot look inside, either because they are password-protected or because the information they contain is not static, but dynamically generated. A search engine may be able to tell you a database exists and provide its URL, but it will be unable to investigate its contents. Journalists need to visit each database site individually to use its service. There are various finding tools for Invisible Web material. The most comprehensive, Direct Search (<http://www.freepint.com/gary/direct.htm>), provides subject access to online databases of all kinds, including public record archives and repositories. The site also links to sites for archived news, speeches, transcripts, lists and rankings, and new additions to the Net. Other finding services include The Invisible Web (<http://www.invisibleweb.com/>), Lycos's searchable databases (http://dir.lycos.com/Reference/Searchable_Databases/), and WebData (<http://www.webdata.com/>).

Commercial database vendors such as CITEC Confirm (<http://www.confirm.com.au/>) can also assist the investigative journalist. Confirm hosts a range of land and property, business and licensing databases, most of which can be searched for a fee. Casual registration is allowed so searches can be done on an as-needs basis. Land title searches are handy for the reporter trying to identify ownership of specific properties, whether because of suspected zoning misuse or because of potential property development. The Queensland Contaminated Land and Environmental

Management Registers might also furnish useful information for stories about development, the environment or health. Confirm also offers access to database searches of the Australian Securities and Investments Commission (<http://www.asic.gov.au/>), which business investigators will find useful. These databases include the National Names Index, the Australian Corporate Reporting Investigative Reports and the National Personal Bankruptcy database. Confirm also hosts a number of vehicle registration, traffic incident and crime databases, but many of these are restricted to police or insurance use only.

Web booksellers such as Amazon (<http://www.amazon.com/>) and OzBooks (<http://www.ozbooks.com/>) allow journalists to discover, buy, and read new books long before they would generally be available in Australia. Computers overcome the tyranny of distance. The same applies to electronic journals, many of which appear on the Net up to four months earlier than the print copy arrives in an Australian library. Some ejournals are all electronic, launched for the Net and unavailable in printed form. The National Library of Australia has catalogued many of these resources and makes access available through its electronic collections page (<http://www.nla.gov.au/collect/electpub.html>).

Journalists should also be aware of alerting services, something the Net does brilliantly. Alerting services include sites that send you tailored stock and share price news; topic-based news headlines; newspapers that email news headlines or industry-sector stories (such as News.com's *Net News*) to the desktop; breaking news alerts in science such as InSight (<http://www.apnet.com/insight/>) and EurekAlert (<http://www.eurekalert.com/>); and email notifications of new Web sites such as the *Scout Report* (<http://scout.cs.wisc.edu/>). No-one could keep up with this kind of material without using the power of computers.

The archiving of press releases and related materials also assists the computer-literate journalist. When Communications Minister Senator Richard Alston announced his 1999 plans to regulate the Internet, his press releases were searchable online. Linked to them from the Australian government's site were transcripts of doorstep interviews with Alston, as well as transcripts of radio interviews with John Laws and other talkback hosts. Some of the related material provided onward links to other documents, one or two of which provided detailed critiques of Alston's proposals, as well as identifying organisations and contacts for follow-up. The contact details included Web and email addresses, as well as phone and fax numbers. In such cases, the computer has considerably simplified the journalist's task. All she has to do now is follow a well-marked trail.

The growing sophistication of in-document 'finding' tools has also helped with journalistic scrutiny. Word processing programs, Web browsers, even Portable Document Format readers such as Adobe Acrobat now provide different search facilities to make it easy to track down certain words, names or phrases within displayed documents or pages. It would be much too time-consuming to read through long documents, such as Commonwealth *Hansard*, in paper form hoping to find a name or phrase, yet the computer can do such things in seconds. In such circumstances, 'fishing expeditions' - even the longest of long shots - become feasible instead of time-consuming chores.

The sheer size of some tasks - analysing surveys, searching census data, polling, creating spreadsheets - now means that the computer way is the only way. Philip Meyer discovered that when trying to analyse voter behaviour (without computer assistance) as far back as 1962"

I don't remember exactly how far we got before giving up, exhausted and squinty-eyed ... The moral of this story is that before you embark on any complicated project involving data analysis, you should ... see what technology is available (1991, 77).

If it is an organisation or business itself that needs investigating, getting background is crucial. To ask the right questions, a reporter needs to be fully briefed about the scope and activities of the organisation. One benefit of organisations being online is that information about so much of what they do - mission, values, projects, reports, publications, key people - is freely available, and can be scrutinised anonymously. Thus, a journalist can do a lot of investigative work without alerting the organisation to the fact that it is being

scrutinised. It is also important to understand what laws govern the organisation, and whether it is required to publish annual reports or file tax returns.

The computerising of many public records is also good news for investigative journalists. While many records, such as court records, income tax records and credit ratings, are unavailable because of privacy or data protection legislation, others are in the public domain and available electronically. These include telephone books, census results, company and other annual reports, trade journals, government documents, statistics, and electoral campaign contributions. Anderson advises investigators to find out exactly what is available:

Gaining access to public records is only part of the battle. Knowing what kinds of information are kept on record is even more important... There are more public records available in various government offices and private files than most journalists realize (1976, 41-4).

The Internet increasingly allows reporters to look over each other's shoulders by providing online access to original sources for stories, for example, in criminal investigations. Hoag Levins, who left his job as executive editor of *Editor & Publisher* to run the APB online newsroom, believes APB is blending traditional and new media:

In coverage of the JonBenet Ramsey murder story, for example, readers get the kind of breaking and analytical coverage found in newspapers and on television. But they also can see the autopsy report, the search warrants, and the ransom note. They can rummage through the 'House of Clues', where an interactive diagram of the Ramsey's Colorado home leads through the evidence (Cunningham 2000, 25).

So other journalists can help. Now that journalists operate in an increasingly wired world, these contacts can be global. There are a number of journalists' organisations that specialise in investigative reporting. They also make their findings and stories available to others. This kind of peer contact can facilitate the work of journalists labouring alone on what could be tremendously important stories or who need to collaborate on huge investigative tasks. As the ICIJ states on its Web site (<http://www.icij.org>):

Too often ... significant but complicated issues are ignored as too complex or inaccessible because of insufficient time, expertise, or money to investigate them. Meanwhile, in many developing countries, investigative reporters are killed, threatened, or imprisoned with alarming regularity. Amazingly unbowed by these life-and-death realities, they are unable to communicate or collaborate with colleagues who may be doing similar work.

The ICIJ is sponsored by the Center for Public Integrity (<http://www.publicintegrity.org/>). This organisation's mission is to provide the American public with the findings of its investigations and analyses of public service, government accountability, and ethics-related issues. Their sponsorship allows the ICIJ to showcase the best international investigative reporting and provide a model for detailed, well-documented research. The Center for Investigative Reporting (<http://www.muckraker.org/>) is a "base for journalists in pursuit of hidden stories about the individuals and institutions that shape our lives". The site includes a section on learning how to be a muckraker. Journalists could also look at The National Institute for Computer Assisted Reporting (<http://www.nicar.org/>), Investigative Reporters & Editors (<http://www.ie.org/>), the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (<http://www.iwpr.net/>) and the UK-based Association of Investigative Journalists (<http://www.aij-uk.com/>). Each will provide stories, news, contacts and support so essential to the long, lonely slog of investigation.

What else can a journalist use a computer to do? All journalists should set up and use a Web-based email account, especially one that allows mail to be downloaded from other email accounts such as those at work. Web-based email is invaluable for journalists on the move. If possible, journalists should keep a copy of their contact books online, possibly in the form of a spreadsheet that can be regularly updated as additions are made.

Why is it so important to master the new information tools that computers and the Internet enable? As Houston says:

I think that if we don't pay attention to how to get to information electronically, how to access it, how to analyse it, and how to disseminate it, we're going to be in a situation of going on the information superhighway in a horse and buggy. (Garrison 1995a, 14)

While the people they are investigating sweep by in chauffeured limousines, perhaps?

Questions to consider:

- 1:** List at least 5 ways in which computers can assist journalists in seeking to access information.
- 2:** What are the potential traps of 'fishing expeditions' for journalists? Are there any benefits?
- 3:** Access one of the search engines available through your internet provider. Find and list the following web addresses:
 - (a) NSW Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC)
 - (b) Sites that represent both the pro and anti-gun lobbies.
 - (c) A US site that provides information about 'Death Row', including the last meal wishes of the condemned
 - (d) The United Nations
 - (e) Four sites, from at least three different countries, that will help you to research a story on Glioblastomas
- 4:** What are Weaver and Williams' tips for successfully finding information on the Web?
- 5:** Access the ASIC site and list the types of information you can access. What are the 'Gull awards' promoted by ASIC?
- 6:** What can you find at the CIA website?

Useful URLs

Government

Government Entry Point
<http://www.fed.gov.au/>

Australian Parliament
<http://www.aph.gov.au/>

House of Representatives
<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/>

Senate
<http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/>

Hansard
<http://www.aph.gov.au/hansard/>

Parliamentary Handbook
<http://www.aph.gov.au/library/handbook/>

Parliamentary Library
<http://www.aph.gov.au/library/>

Australian Electoral Commission
<http://www.aec.gov.au>

Gold Directory – find people in the Federal Government
<http://www.gold.gov.au/>

All Australian governments
<http://www.gov.au/>

State and Local Government
<http://www.sjc.uq.edu.au/ozguide/govt.html>

Governments on the WWW
<http://www.gksoft.com/govt/en/>

Statistical resources

Australian Bureau of Statistics
<http://www.abs.gov.au/>

Australian Statistical Internet sites
<http://www.nla.gov.au/oz/stats.html>

Legal

High Court of Australia
<http://www.hcourt.gov.au/>

Federal Court
<http://www.fedcourt.gov.au/>

Family Court
<http://www.familycourt.gov.au/>

State Supreme Courts
<http://www.lawfoundation.net.au/judgments/>

Australasian Legal Information Institute (AUSTLII)
<http://www.austlii.edu.au/>

Government publications

AGIP (Australian Government Index to Publications)
<http://www.nla.gov.au/oz/gov/agip.html>

Online Government Bookshop
<http://www.bookshop.gov.au/>

UK government publications
<http://www.clicktso.com/>

US government publications
http://www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/locators/cgp/index.html

European Community
http://publications.eu.int/general/en/index_en.htm

Political Parties

Australian Democrats
<http://www.democrats.org.au/>

Australian Greens
<http://www.greens.org.au/>

Australian Labor Party
<http://www.alp.org.au/>

Liberal Party of Australia
<http://www.liberal.org.au/>

National Party of Australia
<http://www.npa.org.au/>

One Nation
<http://www.onenation.com.au/>

Business

Australian Stock Exchange
<http://www.asx.com.au/>

Australian Securities and Investments Commission
<http://www.asic.gov.au/>

Australian Competition and Consumer Commission
<http://www.accc.gov.au/>

Australian Prudential Regulation Authority
<http://www.apra.gov.au/>

CITEC Confirm (land titles, corporate investigative reports, bankruptcy database – charges apply)
<http://www.confirm.com.au/>

Reserve Bank of Australia
<http://www.rba.gov.au/>

Australian Electronic Business Network
<http://www.aebn.org.au/>

Ministerial Council on Consumer Affairs
<http://www.consumer.gov.au/>

Consumers Online
<http://www.consumersonline.gov.au/>

GST
<http://gst.accc.gov.au/>

Corporate Research Guide
<http://www.corpwatch.org/research/>

Activist's Guide to Researching Transnational Corporations
<http://www.corpwatchindia.org/>

Australian Financial Services Directory.
<http://www.afsd.com.au/>

Australian Business links
<http://www.sjc.uq.edu.au/ozguide/bus.html>

NGOs

Organisations – listings, directories and links to individual organisations
<http://www.sjc.uq.edu.au/ozguide/orgs.html>

Education

Australian Universities
http://www.avcc.edu.au/australias_unis/individual_unis/index.htm

Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training
<http://www.dest.gov.au/>

Australian Research Council
<http://www.arc.gov.au/>

Australian Directories (email and phone directories for large organisations)
<http://www.mrp.net/phone.html>

Australian Schools
<http://www.australianschools.com.au/>

State Departments of Education – follow state government links
<http://www.sjc.uq.edu.au/ozguide/govt.html>

Journalists Organisations

International Freedom Exchange - Member Organisations
<http://www.ifex.org/members/>
World Wide Web Virtual Library - Journalism
<http://209.8.151.142/vlj.html#ag>

Association of Investigative Journalists
<http://www.aij-uk.com/>

Committee to Protect Journalists
<http://www.cpj.org/>

Commonwealth Journalists Association
<http://members.ozemail.com.au/~pwessels/cja.html>

Commonwealth Environmental Journalists Association
<http://www.oneworld.org/slejfc/ceja.htm>

European Journalism Centre
<http://www.ejc.nl/default.asp>

Institute of War and Peace Reporting
<http://www.iwpr.net/>

International Federation of Environmental Journalists
<http://www.ifej.org/>

International Federation of Journalists
<http://www.ifj.org/>

International Journalists' Network
<http://www.ijnnet.org/>

Investigative Reporters and Editors, Inc
<http://www.ire.org/>

International Consortium on Investigative Journalism
<http://www.icij.org/>

Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press
<http://www.rcfp.org/>

Reporters sans Frontieres
<http://www.rsff.fr/>

Society of Environmental Journalists
<http://www.sej.org/>

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<http://www.public-i.org/story_01_013100.htm>

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<http://www.public-i.org/story_01_020200.htm>

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