Mini-grant results report • Amber Hinsley, Ph.D. • May 29, 2015

iPad minis: Creating multiplatform journalism with one device

Department of Communication
CMM4100 Multiplatform Journalism (formerly CMM410)
Fall 2014 & Spring 2015

Description of grant-funded materials & goals

The mini-grant funded the purchase two iPad minis, along with protective screens, cases, tripod mounts, bags and iTunes gift card for apps. Using these, my Multiplatform Journalism (MPJ) students produced journalistic pieces that included a combination of text, video, audio and photos. The primary goal of the iPad mini experiment was to have students enhance their reporting and writing skills to use in the mobile journalism environment created in this class. By enabling students to produce multiplatform journalism with a single device, the iPad mini, we provided them the opportunity to work with the same tool that many professional journalists use today. Based on student feedback in Fall 2014, assignments were refined for the Spring 2015 Multiplatform Journalism course.

What worked & what didn't

We integrated use of the iPad minis throughout the course of the semester with a series of projects. These included:

- Mini-projects: On a rotating basis early in the fall and spring semesters, each student used an iPad mini kit to produce one mini project. Students were provided with mini-project examples and had submit their planned project prior to receiving an iPad mini kit. Projects had to include some combination of video, photos and text. Completed projects were screened in class. Each student posted his/her mini-project on his/her blog, along with a post reflecting on the experience of producing a project exclusively on the iPad mini. (See the attached examples.)

  What worked: Students were initially a bit skeptical of having to produce the entire project on an iPad mini over the course of five days, but providing them with several examples beforehand and promptly responding to questions via email as the students worked on their projects helped assuage their concerns. Letting them choose their topic and platforms (choose two: video, photos and text) was instrumental in the success of these projects. The projects helped to familiarize the students with the iPad minis in a fairly "non-scary" way because the assignment was only worth 30 points, and I emphasized that the scores were based on effort and what the students learned in the production process.

  What didn't work as well: It turns out you can't make GIFs on an iPad mini—or at least not with any of the apps we tried. It's also tricky to edit video on the iPad mini's smaller screen (compared to using a laptop/desktop with a mouse) and the students *really* didn't care for it, despite trying out several different video editing apps.
- App tool reviews: Students worked independently first and then in small groups with an iPad mini to review an assigned apps and write reviews of the apps. Apps included iMovie, Videolicious, iPhoto, PhotoShop Express, Evernote, Pages, and others.

What worked: We created a shared Google spreadsheet for the students to note the key features of each app as well to log challenges they encountered using them and to compare their usability with similar apps. Each student initially chose one app to review individually and then in class compared their findings with students who had chosen similar apps. They worked together to complete their reviews, which we then discussed as a class.
What didn't work as well: Students referred to this list occasionally throughout the semester as they worked on other projects but tended to rely on using apps they were already familiar with rather than trying out "new" ones they discovered doing these reviews.

- Twitter scavenger hunt: Students who did not have smartphones checked out an iPad mini to complete this assignment. They "competed" with students from a Lindenwood University journalism class to conduct interviews and take photos, which they then posted to Twitter. (See #SLUvLU on Twitter for examples of their posts.)
    What worked: Only a few students opted to check out iPad minis for this assignment. Students who checked them out did so because they liked having a larger screen to work on, compared to their smartphones.
    What didn't work as well: This wasn't a product of the iPad minis, but part of the scavenger hunt didn't work as well in the spring semester because the Lindenwood students weren't terribly engaged or responsive to SLU students' tweets. I had to adjust the assignment points as a result.
- Project 1 and 2: Students had the option of working on their own or with a classmate on one of these projects, and could use an iPad mini kit to produce all or part of the project if they desired. Projects had to include elements from at least two of the following platforms: online writing (text), audio, video, photo, or other visual. Students were provided with project examples and had submit their project plans. Completed projects were screened in class.
    What worked: Only a few students opted to check out iPad minis for these projects. Those who did use an iPad mini did so because they were traveling to report on their project and wanted take to the smaller device. In every case, they recorded video and took photos with the iPad minis but then downloaded those materials to their personal laptops for editing because they felt the larger screens were easier to work on and being able to use a mouse (instead of touch screen) offered more precision in editing.
    What didn't work as well: In hindsight, I could have required each student to use an iPad mini for some portion of at least one of these projects but was afraid the devices might limit the students' creativity or ability to produce higher quality projects with some of the department's "better" equipment.

Lessons learned & how to draw upon them

Over the summer, I spent time familiarizing myself with the iPad minis and the other equipment, as well as several apps. I also revised my syllabus for the class to introduce the iPad mini kits on the second day of class and to incorporate them into smaller assignments prior to the students' mini-projects. My familiarity with the equipment, along with easing the students into using the iPad mini kits, were undoubtedly the best ways to introduce the students to using those tools. Faculty often assume that students are adept with technology and acclimate themselves easily (and willingly) to

new tools, when the opposite often is true (as I've seen and learned from other classes). Even though all of the MPJ students had smartphones and/or tablets prior to the class, most had never viewed them as professional tools. Although they were curious about the iPad minis, they also were intimidated by using them as devices to produce journalism. As one student explained, "it had never occurred" to her than an iPad mini could be used in that way. Introducing the iPad mini kits slowly at the start of the semester in a series of in-class activities helped to build the students' confidence in their own abilities and helped them learn the capabilities of the devices. Additionally, I showed them several examples of journalists' work that had been done using similar devices (or could have been with them) and helped students brainstorm ways they could use the iPad mini kits to produce their own work.

In addition to requiring the use of the iPad mini kits for certain assignments, I also required the students to write reflection blog posts for each assignment. For me, these were invaluable in getting feedback about students' experiences using the iPad mini kits because they reflected upon what worked well for them, what posed challenges and what they were proud of. After all of the students had completed their mini-projects, we had a class discussion about students' experiences using the devices and their thoughts on whether the department should purchase more to be available for checkout to students in other Communication Department classes.

As I complete my own reflection on using the iPad mini kits in the class, I am confident that the approach I took in introducing the iPad minis to the students was the best choice to help ensure their success with their individual mini-projects and other class assignments. Having the mini-project assignment helped students further their experimentation with the devices. I also am relieved that I did not require the students to use the iPad minis for Project 1 & 2, which I had debated when redesigning the syllabus. Some students were eager to use them again but others wanted to use some of the higher-end equipment that we have in the department and I think they would have felt they were being "held back" by a requirement that they use the iPad minis for one or both of the projects. (From a logistical standpoint, it would have difficult to balance the students' workflow since we had a limited number of iPad mini kits.)

Possible applications for other faculty

Outside the Department of Communication, other faculty could incorporate devices such as iPad minis into the production of class projects on a variety of scales. For example, programs in social science like History or American Studies could use iPad minis to record oral histories and use apps such as iMovie or Videolicious to edit them. Humanities departments such as Art could use iPad minis to create a variety of art projects and then curate them on a blog site such as WordPress. Even the hard sciences can benefit from adding iPad minis or similar devices to their courses. For example, students could produce short videos illustrating Chemistry (or Physics, etc.) in everyday life through a series of interviews or visuals. I also would strongly recommend that other faculty have students write reflections to accompany such projects.

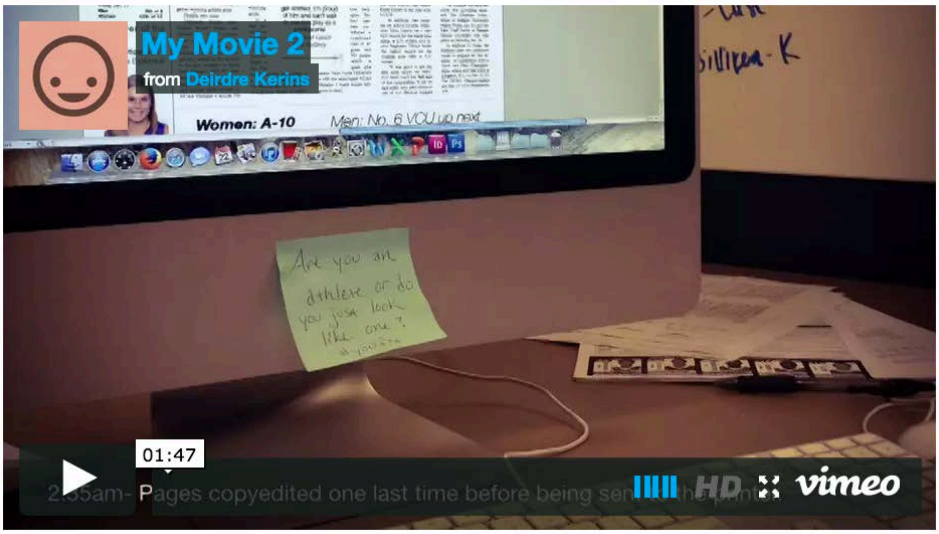
Mini project example: [Production night at the UNews]

CAUTION: ENTERING THE NEWSROOM

For many SLU students, the weekly newspaper simply appears out of thin air each Thursday morning. Many people fail to realize the immense about of time and effort that goes into producing each edition. The staff at the SLU University News puts in many hours before production night , and long hours on the actual production night (each Wednesday of the academic year). My video shows the amount of time it takes to produce the paper, from start to finish. I've placed time stamps and titles on several of the photos and videos to give the viewer background on what's occurring in each shot.

The UNews staff includes : John Schuler, Casey Waughn, Tim Wilhelm, Paul Brunkhorst, Maggie Needham, Katherine Kelliher, Ryan McKinley, Adnan Syed, Jessica Park, Ryan Quinn, Lexi Vasos, Kyle Smith, Josh Connelly, and me.

Check out Production Night at the UNews!



Mini project reflection example

REMOVING THE "PAPER" OUT OF "NEWSPAPER": IPAD MINI PROJECT REFLECTION

Conceptualizing a story idea and the general format of the video for my iPad mini project took no time at all. The process of gathering video footage, photos, and notes for the time stamps on the video was fairly straightforward, and enjoyable. I relished in the ability to make my fellow UNews editors cringe as I repeatedly captured videos and photos of them working diligently on the newspaper. The only part about working in the newsroom that makes it difficult to shoot video and photos is the lighting and bland wall coloring. The harsh lights wash everyone out, and since no one has seen the sun in months, most people just blend right in with the sandpaper-colored walls. I used Photoshop Express to pump up the vibrance and enhance the shadows on the majority of the images. Plus, it helped immensely that Photoshop Express was simply formatted and easy to use. I worried initially about using the app since Photoshop on a desktop computer can potentially present problems and headaches, even if one is familiar with the software.

I used Cinemagraph to compress my videos into loops, which I thought added another dimensions to my video. Since most of the editors are on the computers throughout most of the evenings, there isn't much movement in the newsroom, so although I'd wanted to do a hyperlapse of the room, it wouldn't have worked very well. Thus, as one can see in my video, I captured moments of people collaborating, talking, or editing on the computers. These serve as the main motions of the video, even though they are minute and often go unnoticed in everyday life.

I eventually used iMovie as the structural format of my video simply because I know how to use the app, and the remainder of the video apps didn't quite provide me with the tools I needed to construct the project in the way I developed originally.

Overall, the project allowed me to get my feet wet and try out some new software; useful for when the next main projects come along!

Mini project example: [5 Ways to Experience STL Fashion & Culture]

5 Ways to Experience STL Fashion & Culture

Posted on February 15, 2015 by Macey Kate

Ever wanted to get more involved within the beautiful city of St. Louis, Missouri? Whether you're an STL native, spending your college years under the arch, or even paying the city a short visit...STL is booming with fashion, culture, and more. You're one-stop-shop for anything and everything St. Louis? Look no further than ALIVE Magazine; a localized, monthly mag that gives you 101+ reasons to get out and involved.

Interested? Keep reading to hear the top 5 ways ALIVE can help (straight from the desk of ALIVE Digital Media intern, Macey Kate Herges)

Mini project reflection example

iCreated a Project using only an iPad Mini

Posted on February 16, 2015 by Macey Kate

My latest post, "5 Ways to Experience STL Fashion and Culture," was the product of a very interesting assignment for a favorite class of mine; SLU Multiplatform Journalism. The class was challenged to put away our laptops and cell phones and were given iPad minis. At first, I was a bit intimidated to create content using only an iPad mini despite the fact that I own one myself. In all honesty, I was unsure of what an iPad mini could be useful for outside of surfing the web, online shopping, and skimming through my favorite social media accounts.

I chose to relate my mini project to my current internship at ALIVE Magazine here in St. Louis, Missouri. I knew that those reading my blog's content would be interested in gaining insight surrounding STL's fashion and cultural scenes, and I wanted to share my favorite source with them. The goal of my post is to simply remind STL city-dwellers, like myself, of the rich culture and diverse happenings in our city and to tell them that up to date information can be at their fingertips (often, for free!) when they read ALIVE Magazine.

To create my post's content, I utilized the camera feature on the iPad mini, the photo editing features that come standard on each iPad mini, and InstaShaper (an app that allows photo editing, text additions, and more). I wanted to show that content produced using only an iPad mini can be original, look professional, and can stand up against content produced with advanced editing software on computers or photo editing software. Each image was taken with unique angles in mind. From there, I simply turned each photo black and white. The images were then imported into InstaShaper; where I added transparent color and text.

I had a great experience working with the iPad mini and was surprised with how much versatility, capibility, and fun came with searching for apps, picking a topic to base my project on, and finally completing what I set out to create. If I could change something about my final product/blog post, I would look deeper into the capabilities of the iPad mini and produce a few different versions of my content to truly test the potential of the iPad mini. I think that the iPad mini is a tool that all professionals should consider for on-the-go coverage, photography, and more. The iPad mini's ability to create visually appealing content with only a few swipes of a finger, easy-to-use apps, and a little patience is incredibly valuable. I can't wait to discover what else the iPad mini is capable of!