

TRENDS IN ARTS JOURNALISM

ARTRAIN & CREATIVE VOICE BACKGROUND RESEARCH REPORT

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ARTRAIN & CREATIVE VOICE MISSION

Artrain's mission is to bring arts and culture to people, especially people in towns where traditional museum programs or other art and cultural programs do not usually reach, believing that "every person, every classroom and every community should have access to quality arts and cultural programs regardless of where they are located or their economic status."¹ Up until about ten years ago, Artrain enacted on this vision by using a train to travel exhibitions. Today, Artrain no longer uses the rail system; however, they use other methods such as engagement programs, touring exhibitions, and media outlets to bring arts and culture to more people. Artrain's program of interest for our team is called Creative Voice, which uses videos on social media to share and spread the word about arts and cultural based events in Detroit and Southeast Michigan.

THE PROBLEM

Creative Voice produces videos of local arts and cultural events, where participants involved—attendees, performers, artists, coordinators, etc., are interviewed about their thoughts on the event. After some editing the videos are upload to social media with the hopes that they are shared. The problem with Creative Voice is the work to produce and share the videos takes too long without much reward in terms of views. Artrain needs Creative Voice videos to reach more people in order for their operations to remain sustainable, and hopefully to be able to use view data to show outside organizations, such as in grant applications, that these videos are reaching a wide audience.

THE QUESTIONS

This background research report will address the following questions:

1. How did Creative Voice begin, where are they now, and what events do they cover?
2. What is the current state of arts journalism and how does local coverage compare?
3. With a decline in arts journalism, what are alternatives to arts coverage in news outlets?
4. How does Creative Voice work as an alternative arts journalism source?

¹ "Vision, Mission and Goals." *Artrain*, accessed October 1, 2016, <http://wp.artrain.org/vision-mission-and-goals/>.

INTRODUCTION

Creative Voice labels its videos as social media-based arts journalism,² embracing the changes in the journalism field by creating videos to share on social media and bring the event coverage back to the community. As such, in this report I will research the arts journalism sector and look at how Creative Voice fits in with the trends in the field. First, to help contextualize Creative Voice's place in arts journalism I will review how Creative Voice started, where it is now, and what type of events they cover. Following, I will explore the current state of arts journalism, to address how arts journalism has changed over the years and look at alternative arts coverage that has popped up in response to the changing landscape. Lastly, as Creative Voice tries to fill in a gap of the lacking arts coverage by local news outlets, I will review Creative Voice as an alternative arts coverage source.

BACKGROUND OF CREATIVE VOICE

Program History

Creative Voice, formerly known as CriticCar, is an arts journalism program that uses social media to share video coverage of local arts and culture events in Detroit and the greater Southeast, Michigan.³ In April 2012, Creative Voice was awarded \$57,500⁴ by the Knight Foundation as part of the Knight/National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Community Arts Journalism Challenge to launch the initial idea of this program.⁵ The program was first conceived as a “mobile video booth [that gives] audiences an opportunity to record their own reviews of arts events...[and share] through social media channels.”⁶ Now, Creative Voice uses an iPad and custom Creative Voice editing application to record interviews with attendees and key people involved in the event, creating a highlight video of the arts event. The hope is that these videos will be shared on social media, after Creative Voice initially posts them, to help create awareness and engagement around the local arts scene.⁷

Artrain and Creative Voice

After receiving the grant money, Creative Voice's creators Jennifer Conlin and Dan Shaw, found a needed partner in Artrain in order to officially be awarded the grant money through a non-profit organization, as the grant could not be awarded to them as individuals.⁸ Artrain is a non-profit arts organization based in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Its mission is “to deliver discovery and—through the power of arts and culture—transform lives, organizations and communities”⁹ and thus it was a

² “Creative Voice.” *Artrain*, accessed October 22, 2016, <http://wp.artrain.org/current-programs/creative-voice/>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ “iCritic Detroit.” *Knight Foundation*, accessed October 22, 2016, <http://www.knightfoundation.org/grants/20113542/>.

⁵ Lara Pellegrinelli, “Money For Arts Journalism, In Three Cities That Need It,” *The Record: Music News from NPR*, April 25, 2012, accessed October 22, 2016,

<http://www.npr.org/sections/therecord/2012/04/24/151286975/money-for-arts-journalism-in-three-cities-that-need-it>

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ “Creative Voice.” *Artrain*, accessed October 22, 2016, <http://wp.artrain.org/current-programs/creative-voice/>.

⁸ Patrick Dunn, “With CriticCar Everyone's A Critic,” *Concentrate - Ann Arbor*, August 7, 2013, accessed October 22, 2016, <http://www.secondwavemedia.com/concentrate/features/CriticCar0250.aspx>.

⁹ “Vision, Mission and Goals.” *Artrain*, accessed October 1, 2016, <http://wp.artrain.org/vision-mission-and-goals/>.

good fit for Creative Voice with their shared interest of increasing the awareness of the local arts and culture scene. Deb Polich, the CEO of Artrain “says, ... ‘[they’re] always constantly on the lookout for projects that are a good fit for [their] mission.’”¹⁰ Creative Voice fit that bill and became one of Artrain’s programs and in the fall of 2012 Creative Voice and Artrain started producing their first videos.¹¹

Event Coverage

As an arts journalism platform, Creative Voice covers various art and culture related events in the area. When asked in an interview with the NEA in 2013 how Creative Voice chooses what events they cover, Conlin responded,

“For me, it’s about the diversity of places and different types of performances. We’re interested in covering Wayne State University, which has a wonderful theater program so we’ll go to a performance there, or the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, or a church where there’s a wonderful choral group. I’m looking to give voice to what people are seeing [so they can] tell us what they like and don’t like as ‘citizen journalists’.”¹²

Reviewing the archives on Creative Voice’s website¹³ I classified the 64 highlight videos posted in the last two years, October 2014 to October 2016, to look at the break down of the types of events Creative Voice has been covering and where those events are located. For event type, Creative Voice covered more visual arts and music events then other types as shown in figure 1, though they did seemingly try to cover a variety of events. This is further emphasized by the 20% of “other” events, which include events that did not clearly fall into one of the other categories, such as the Michigan Renaissance Festival, or events that straddled multiple categories.

VIDEOS BY EVENT TYPE

■ Arts ■ Music ■ Other ■ Dance ■ Theater ■ Film

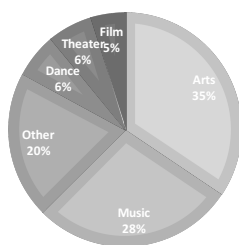


Figure 1: Percentage of events posted by Creative Voice classified by event type.

VIDEOS BY LOCATION

■ Detroit ■ Ann Arbor ■ Ypsilanti ■ Other

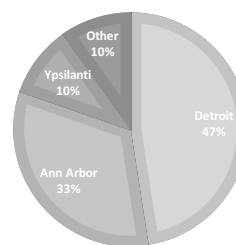


Figure 2: Percentage of videos posted by Creative Voice classified by location of event.

¹⁰ Dunn, “With CriticCar Everyone’s A Critic.”

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Victoria Hutter, “CriticCar and the Art of Detroit,” *National Endowment for the Arts: Art Works Blog*, January 22, 2013, accessed October 22, 2016, <https://www.arts.gov/art-works/2013/criticcar-and-art-detroit>.

¹³ *Creative Voice*, accessed October 22, 2016, <http://creativevoice.buzz>.

In reviewing locations in figure 2, it is shown that Creative Voice favors Detroit and Ann Arbor over other cities in Southeast Michigan, though they are not limited to those places. The large coverage of events in Detroit makes sense as this is where the project was original conceived, in order to “take advantage of Detroit's diverse cultural community.”¹⁴

After reviewing how Creative Voice began, how they started working with Artrain, and what types of event the art journalism platform creates videos for, it was time to learn more about how they fit in with the overall arts journalism sector.

ARTS JOURNALISM

National Coverage

The Knight/NEA Community Arts Journalism Challenge, through which Creative Voice was awarded their initial grant money, was created to “inspire new, innovative models for local, high-quality arts coverage and criticism”¹⁵ because arts journalism is in decline. In 2011, during the announcement of the grant competition, Dennis Scholl, Knight’s Vice President for Arts, reported in an interview with the NEA that 25 percent of all journalism jobs have been lost in the previous five to eight years. Moreover, looking specifically at arts journalism, 50 percent of those jobs had been lost,⁷ signifying that there may not be as much art coverage in local new outlets as there once was. This trend of the decline of arts coverage is not surprising to hear from a Vice President of the Knight Foundation, since the grant he was announcing at this time was specifically targeted at increasing arts coverage.

However, the decline of arts journalism has been confirmed by others. In 2004, the National Arts Journalism Program (NAJP) at Columbia University published their findings of the survey *Reporting the Arts II* to further gage the trends in arts coverage from their first survey *Reporting the Arts* published five years earlier. One of their findings was that any “resources metropolitan newsrooms allocate[d] to the arts [were] generally flat or in retreat.”¹⁶ The amount of space dedicated to arts coverage either remained stable or greatly declined for all of the newspapers in the study. This was shown not only by the amount of space for articles decreasing, but also the length of articles decreasing. Interestingly, as the news coverage of arts and culture was decreasing the amount of listings was increasing.¹⁷ So as more and more arts and culture events are being listed in newspapers, the follow-up art news coverage or reviews are not there in the same numbers.

¹⁴ Pellegrinelli, “Money For Arts Journalism.”

¹⁵ “Announcing the Knight/NEA Community Arts Journalism Challenge,” *National Endowment for the Arts: Art Works Blog*, July 6, 2011, accessed October 22, 2016, <https://www.arts.gov/art-works/2011/announcing-knightnea-community-arts-journalism-challenge>.

¹⁶ András Szántó, Daniel S. Levy, and Andrew Tyndall, *Reporting the Arts II: News Coverage of Arts and Culture in America* (National Arts Journalism Program, Columbia University, 2004), <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/najp/publications/researchreports/rtaIIentire.pdf>, 10.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

Local Coverage

The cities covered in the study were Charlotte, Chicago, Cleveland, Denver, Houston, Miami, Philadelphia, Portland, Providence, and the San Francisco Bay Area.¹⁸ Since it is likely that these cities might not be representative of every area in the United States, I decided to take a quick look at some local news sources—the Detroit Free Press, the Detroit News, MLive, and the Ann Arbor Observer, to see what if any arts coverage currently existed. Reviewing the websites for these four news outlets showed that only one had a section devoted to arts and culture at the top level access to their articles. This was the Ann Arbor Observer who has a Culture section described as “Arts and Entertainment reviews and news.”¹⁹ The other sites all had Entertainment sections at the top level with sub-sections such as Celebrities, Dining Out, Movies, and Music. For the Detroit News the Entertainment sub-sections start to show more diversification with the additional sub-sections of Stage and Arts + Festivals.²⁰ This shows that there is definitely some arts and culture coverage in this area; however, with the exception of perhaps the Ann Arbor Observer, it is not a main area for these local news outlets.

ALTERNATIVE ARTS COVERAGE

With a decrease of arts coverage in mainstream new outlets, it begs the question where are communities getting their information about the local arts and culture scene? “The proliferation on the Web of arts blogs and literary blogs within the past two years suggests that the public discourse on the arts may be migrating to the Internet.”²¹ Locally in Ann Arbor, one example of this is Jenn McKee, the former arts reporter for Ann Arbor’s MLive, who after being laid off in January 2016 now works as a freelance writer and maintains her own arts blog for coverage of events and artists in the area.²² Blogs of former staff-writers are not the only examples we see. The Ann Arbor District Library (AADL) started an arts blog, Pulp, last year to share “previews, thoughts, critiques, reviews, dorky puns, opinions, observations, and heads-ups on what’s happening in the area”²³. These blog posts include contributions from AADL staff members, community members, professional journalists, and more.²⁴ A public library is a unique choice for increasing arts coverage in the area, but as the coverage has declined in mainstream newspapers clearly they saw a need for it in the community.

One of the concerns many express when they hear about journalism and news coverage moving to the internet and blogs, is whether it will be quality information. Specific to arts journalism, “there is debate about whether the Web will serve as the voice for cultural communities—and whether the quality of the commentary can meet the standards of the best print journalism.”²⁵ While this is

¹⁸ Ibid., 24.

¹⁹ *Ann Arbor Observer*, accessed October 22, 2016, http://annarborobserver.com/articles/article_list.html.

²⁰ *The Detroit News*, accessed October 22, 2016, <http://www.detroitnews.com/entertainment/>.

²¹ Laura Zakaras, and Julia F. Lowell, *Cultivating Demand for the Arts: Arts Learning, Arts Engagement, and State Arts Policy* (Rand Corporation, 2008), http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2008/RAND_MG640.pdf, 68.

²² Jenn McKee, “About,” *A2 Arts Addict* (blog), accessed October 22, 2016, <https://a2artsaddict.wordpress.com/about/>.

²³ *Pulp: Arts Around Ann Arbor* (blog), accessed October 22, 2016, <http://pulp.aadl.org>.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Zakaras, “Cultivating Demand for the Arts,” 68.

a valid concern, as Douglas McLennan, Founder of ArtsJournal and Director of NAJP, writes, traditional arts journalism had stopped working long before the rise of the internet, especially with the coverage of some types of culture, as “the old model of experts preaching to ‘the masses’ had tenuous hold of an audience long before the internet came along.”²⁶ Therefore, a change in arts and culture journalism was long overdue.²⁷ What McLennan does not mention is what that change should look like, questioning “which [projects] are worth paying attention to [and] which are not just interesting projects, but viable ones as well?”²⁸ My question is, how can Creative Voice be an alternative arts coverage project for the area that is worth paying attention to?

CREATIVE VOICE AND ARTS JOURNALISM

Reviewing the state of arts journalism and how alternative arts news sources have popped up to combat the decline of arts and culture coverage elsewhere, it seems like Creative Voice is off to a great start by using an alternative form of media—social media, to share their arts coverage, as well as bringing it back to “the masses”—the community members, by interviewing them and bringing them back into the conversation. In the words of co-creator Dan Shaw, Creative Voice does offer something different than traditional arts journalism because “it doesn't replace professional critics—it just adds a whole new forum for dialogue.”²⁹ Elaborating further,

“The forces of media tend to appeal only to the readers they already have. We wanted to allow everybody to offer a critique of a cultural event, to make people think of all the different cultural institutions as part of one big community.”³⁰

With Creative Voice’s videos, they are stepping away from the model of experts reviewing for the community and instead moving towards the model of the community reviewing for the community. At the same time, by mixing attendee and community interviews with interviews from organizers, and having trained journalists conceive of this program, the videos have a level of legitimacy necessary for their videos to be considered valid arts news coverage.

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

In our forthcoming interviews, this background report will serve as a deeper understanding of the landscape of arts journalism in which Creative Voice came to be. From this research I have learned that Creative Voice has become a form of alternative arts coverage in response to a declining arts journalism field. Moreover, they offer a new perspective on arts coverage by bring the reviews and interviews back to the community members. Despite their unique form of arts coverage in the area, their videos are not getting the view numbers and engagement they would like. Further research and our interviews will need to focus on Creative Voice’s practices of sharing their videos in order to see what can be improved for the videos to reach a wider audience.

²⁶ Douglas McLennan, “A Future For Journalism About The Arts,” *diacritical* (blog), July 11, 2009, accessed October 22, 2016, http://www.artsjournal.com/diacritical/2009/07/a_future_for_journalism_about.html.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Pellegrinelli, “Money For Arts Journalism.”

³⁰ Ibid.

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http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2008/RAND_MG640.pdf.