

The *Bakersfield Californian* and Blogging the Courtroom

Abstract

This case is about the professional conflict one journalist at the *Bakersfield Californian* experiences when editors ask her to “blog” from a trial she is covering. In the blog, or web-log—which appears within a special section of the Bakersfield.com website—she is asked to offer informal observations, often in the form of running commentary, about a complicated murder case. Meanwhile for the daily newspaper, she continues to write stories which observe the journalistic conventions of objectivity, accuracy and balance. Jessica Logan becomes increasingly uncomfortable as she learns that her blog entries are unedited. Typos and grammar errors occur with regularity, but eventually she also makes mistakes. Mistakes in the newspaper result in a notation in a reporter’s personnel record; the rules for a blog seem unclear. But her editors keep reassuring Logan. They argue that blogs are like a sneak peek into a reporter’s notebook, not like a news story.

Students will be asked to consider whether blogs are a legitimate form of journalism. Does a reporter with a blog potentially undermine his reputation as a journalist? What do news readers gain from a blog that they would not get from a web or print story? Should blogs be subject to the same internal rules and regulations that govern the material printed in a newspaper? How can news organizations best incorporate this new way of communicating with readers into their existing standards and practices?

The case study can be used in a class on editorial management, on new media, on blogging or on reporting norms.

Credits

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