**Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Adding a Platform Case Studies**

*Directions: Read the case studies and spend some time reflecting on how Jacob Geiger and Rachel Lanter planned and marketed their new online publication and platform.*

1. As you read, annotate your article according to the following system:

* Underline reasons that Jacob and Rachel’s publications decided to go online.
* Highlight ways that Jacob and Rachel’s publications marketed to their audience.
* Put an exclamation point (!) next to anything that surprises you and explain WHY in the margin next to that paragraph.
* Put a question mark (?) next to anything you are unsure about or would like to discuss with others and explain WHY in the margin next to that paragraph.

***Background***

Jacob Geiger holds a bachelor’s degree in print journalism from Washington and Lee University (Va.). While at W&L, he served as the editor-in-chief for the student newspaper, the Ring-Tum Phi. He worked for SNL Financial out of college, writing for bankers and stock market analysts, after having completed internships in business journalism in college. Later, he took a job covering politics for the Richmond Times-Dispatch, but, within several months, he was asked to help out with a new business-related online publication, Work It Richmond, because of his business and online journalism background. Initially, his role was to conduct focus groups to figure out what the market audience needed. Jacob’s role shifted as he built relationships with the intended audience, and his short-time assignment turned into a full-time job. Now, he is the main reporter and editor for the website.

Rachel Lanter is a graduate of Pleasant Ridge High School (Kan.). She was recruited to join the newspaper staff as a junior and served as a reporter her junior year and as editor-in-chief her senior year. While PRHS had attempted to go online in the past, previous staffs had not marketed the website and abandoned it after several months. Rachel investigated plans with her adviser and decided to go with School Newspapers Online. She marketed the website using word of mouth as well as posting an invitation on the school Jumbotron announcement board. After a few months, Rachel started Facebook and Twitter accounts for the publication and was able to observe the website traffic for The Ridge Online grow exponentially.

***Their Stories***

*Question: Describe your publication and why it expanded or was started.*

**Jacob**: “A couple of months after I got here, the paper was starting a new online venture to do small business coverage … My job was to think about and design some of the content for this new site, which didn’t have a name yet, and figure out who the audience might be and what they would need and like to read. So, I did a lot of focus grouping and meeting with people over several weeks and started to figure out there was this need for news focused very specifically on small businesses and that we really needed a site that catered to the needs of small businesses for news, which were different than the needs of people working for bigger companies.”

**Rachel**: “We’re in a farming community, so a lot of people want to hear about stuff that relates to the agrarian society. Within the school itself, students want to learn about all the new trends, they aren’t as willing to read about news, so we have to put a twist on it. Still give it to them, but make it more interesting and add graphics and things like that … The community itself really didn’t know that much about the publication, none of them had ever seen it really. People’s kids might have brought [the papers] home … [The web] made it more readily available and we got more viewers. And, of course, when we first started the website, nobody knew about it whatsoever, so we had to try to get more people, but eventually the community started catching on. We started writing about topics that weren’t just about the school, but also about the community as a whole, to try to bring more people into it.”

*Question: Why did you decide to go online?*

**Jacob**: “We realized that we needed to do something to reach the people who were interested in business news, but for whatever reason, weren’t subscribing to our paper … We decided we should go and find a way to meet them and bring them news and keep them as a customer, even if it was online and not in print.”

**Rachel**: “We had to transition into getting it more into the real world, because everyone is on the Internet now, print is going out of style, sadly, but we had to go through different websites and find one that we liked and just decided to work with that. Eventually we added social media after we worked on the website for a little bit … We’re starting to move more toward Twitter, but originally everyone was on Facebook, so that was the first one we did.”

*Question: How did you market your online platform to your audience?*

**Jacob:** “I was new to town, I didn’t know many business owners or business groups, so I went first to some groups suggested by people who worked for the business section [of the Richmond Times-Dispatch] .. and I would just ask to meet with their leadership and then I’d ask them to help me get in touch with their members and just find out, “What do you do? What sort of business news do you read right now? Where do you get it from? What do you feel like you’re not getting?” So it was really just a great exercise in listening, and it was easy for a reporter to do this because I just treated it like an interview and I was writing a plan for internal use of what we would cover. We would meet with anyone who would come to us, or let us come to them, so we talked to a really wide range of people. We were trying to do this very quickly, we wanted to take something to market fast and make changes along the way if we needed to … so the focus grouping only lasted three, maybe four weeks … the whole time to launch was about three months … We used the first six weeks as a soft launch ... we gave [our focus groups] a lot of ability to provide feedback to me and that helped us so that after six weeks of sending it to that smaller audience, we were ready to send it to a bigger audience.”

**Rachel:** “Social media was definitely I think the biggest one that we started using, just word of mouth was a lot of it too. I know I would have friends that would come up to me and have no idea about any of it and say, “Oh, I heard you have a new website!” They would then go up to somebody else and say, “Hey, did you hear that we actually have a website now for this?” A lot of it was word of mouth, but social media definitely helped once we got on there, because we started getting a lot more views once we were on that.”

*Question: How have you continued to reach out to your audience?”*

**Jacob: “**I’ve become good at figuring out what our other business reporters do that’s relevant to the small business audience and I’m very aggressive about linking those articles [from the larger Times-Dispatch website] in our email newsletter, and that allows me to focus on corners of coverage that we don’t get to do as much of because of resources or time. So, that has maximized our reach and allowed us to get more business news to the entire community … People meeting me face to face has been really important to our success because once they establish a connection with me, it’s not just that an email arrives in your inbox, you know that I’m behind it, and that I’m picking these stories out for you, and that’s made people much more dedicated readers once they’ve spent time with me. This makes them more likely to encourage their friends to sign up and suggest stories.”

**Rachel:** “There are a lot more graphics, we could add slideshows of stuff, how to do certain things, which we could do in the paper, but it was a lot more difficult. So we really engaged them more, being able to do that on the website, and we have recordings and videos. … There are different things that draw different groups in, so more to the point for the parents, because they’re more likely to read it whether it sounds fun or not. For our students, you have to make it more exciting and grab their attention, because a lot of them don’t want to sit there and read something, especially if they don’t know what it’s about, so you have to grab their attention.”

*Question: What advice would you give to high school publications wanting to go online?*

**Jacob**: “It’s a lot easier to do that today. WIth something like Wordpress, you can build relatively simple sites … once you get it set up, the back end of importing content, loading photos, writing captions, editing stories is so intuitive and easy. When we built Work It, we built it in Wordpress, and we operated it there for its’ first 18 months … that was what let us build it so quickly. We primarily use Facebook and Twitter to share our stories and have conversation with users around our stories … If you’ve got good photography, Pinterest is a good place to showcase it … Go talk to people, find out what they want to read, and make that the backbone. Figure that out first, because it’s much easier to market to an audience if you don’t have to convince them that they want what you want for them … Don’t underestimate the value of a face-to-face.”

**Rachel:** “Figure out which platform you want to use, but keep it to yourself, don’t tell the entire class for making decisions. Have people for different things, in at least pairs, like social media, posting stories, posting videos, definitely splitting up the tasks because with the website there is so much more you can do than with print, so you really need to delegate. … We just dived in, like, we’ll start everything today, and that actually worked really well for us. Figure out which social media sites you want to use and have somebody who is in charge of that and keeping it up to date. You need to constantly update it and keep the viewers engaged with it. … Social media is a great way to spread information.”