

## **THE HUB OF ALL STORY IDEAS: READERS**

~ *Jacqui Banaszynski* ~

Knight Chair Professor, *The Missouri School of Journalism*  
Editing Fellow, *The Poynter Institute*

### **THE READER WHEEL**

One way to discover good enterprise stories, or approaches to stories, is by focusing on “stakeholders” – people who are invested in or affected by events. The typical list of stakeholders includes people who have a direct involvement or interest in some news event or issue.

But if you think more broadly as you’re brainstorming, the list of stakeholders becomes much longer and more interesting. Almost any issue or event sparks some curiosity or interest or frustration on the part of a broad array of people. Plugging into that curiosity presents creative story possibilities, and helps you think about the myriad questions readers might have about subject.

Building a Reader Wheel is a way for reporters to quickly plug into the curiosity and interest of readers. It can help identify:

- the range of interest in a story subject
- stories that might otherwise be overlooked
- fresh approaches to evergreen stories
- story angles that are best suited to a targeted audience or niche publication
- more and better sources for a story or a beat
- more and better questions

A reader wheel is best built with a small group of people, or an editor and reporter working together. It is ideal for use by a full production team – editor, reporter, graphics reporter, designer, photographer, Web producer. It can be used as a solo brainstorming tool.

It works like this:

Draw a circle in the middle of a piece of paper or on a whiteboard. Write the event or issue you are covering in the circle. Now as quickly as you can, create “spokes” radiating from that hub: list all the people or groups who might be involved in, interested in, affected by or curious about the event or subject. Try to list as many spokes as you can, even if their connection to the central topic seems pretty remote.

NOTE: Don’t edit your thinking at this stage; let your curiosity and connections run wild. The most creative stories come from a combination of a disciplined brainstorming structure and unfettered (unedited) ideas. So try to separate the brainstorming process from the production process.