

# INNOVATORS IN LATIN AMERICAN JOURNALISM





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*Brazil's Federal Supreme Court*  
(Photo by Pedrobcamargo (Own work) [[CC BY-SA 4.0](#)], via Wikimedia Commons)

# Brazilian reporters create profitable news site, JOTA, specializing in judicial issues

**By Ismael Nafria**  
*December 6, 2017*

Can a rapidly growing digital media outlet, which focuses exclusively on judicial matters and which charges for information, succeed and become sustainable in the current media environment? The founders of Brazilian site [JOTA](#) – named for the J in Justice – are proving that yes, all this is possible.

A small group of journalists who previously worked for some of the most prominent media outlets in Brazil launched JOTA in September 2014.

These journalists – initially led by Felipe Seligman, who had written for newspaper Folha de S. Paulo, and Felipe Recondo, who covered the judiciary for O Estado de S. Paulo – saw an opportunity in Brazil, [where there are more than one million lawyers](#).

JOTA, whose beginnings were financed by family and friends of the founders, reached financial sustainability at the end of 2015, just a year after launching. Since then, it has been a profitable company that reinvests all profits for the organic growth of the project, as explained to the **Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas** by CEO, Marc Sangarné.

## Turning an idea into a reality

Before working as an entrepreneur in the field of digital media, Seligman accumulated years of experience in the field of judicial information while working for newspaper Folha de S. Paulo.

When asked about the motivations for creating JOTA, he explained that “Brazilian society is very judicialized.”



*Felipe Seligman, cofounder of JOTA  
(Courtesy)*

He and several of his competitors who were covering judicial issues for other papers realized “there was an opportunity” because many lawyers, offices and companies in the country said they weren’t getting sufficient information from what was published in the main media outlets, even if it was the news of the day.

“The lawyers complained that they needed more in-depth, more analytical information,” Seligman explained.

At the same time, there were issues that were of great interest to these actors, such as tax regulation, which in many cases were not considered relevant enough and were not dealt with by the media.

The lack of coverage, coupled with the challenges facing mainstream news outlets, signaled the need for something new.

“I had the feeling that there was space to create something, to become an entrepreneur,” Seligman said. “And if I wanted to try something, that was the best moment, because times of crisis are times of opportunities.”

It took awhile, Seligman said, to figure out how their idea would take shape. “One day we realized that we had to understand one thing. If we wanted to do something that was useful, that mattered, that was relevant, that had an impact, that helped the people who needed that information, we had to understand what they wanted,” Seligman said. “We started talking to a lot of people and tried to understand the kind of information they needed every day.” And so, after a period of reflection, JOTA launched in September 2014 with a team of five people working from Brasilia, the capital of the country and seat of the country’s major judicial institutions.

The site’s audience consists of students and law graduates, law firms and corporate clients.

They started out by launching JOTA on Twitter – an experiment and a way to gauge interest in the project. JOTA’s website launched a month later, and content was free of charge for the first three months. Vertical channels were then released, with the first dedicated to taxes.

In December 2014, the team installed a paywall and attracted its first corporate clients for [JOTA Tributário](#), the taxes vertical.

The second vertical focused on [business competition issues](#). Today, JOTA has seven vertical channels specialized in different subjects: Justice, Taxes, Competition, Work, Career, Law and Politics. Additionally, it has special reports, opinion columns, chronologies of various judicial issues and a special on [Operation Lava Jato](#), among other content.

After a year of activity, JOTA had 10 professionals on the team. Seligman acted as CEO of the company, but as he explained, “I did not have any skills in the management of the company.”

The journalists involved had an interesting and growing project on their hands, but they were in need of people with more management and administrative experience. A year after the launch, they added two key people: Mark Sangarné as CEO, and journalist Fernando Mello who helped with sales, among other things. "Basically, they organized house," Seligman said.

## Bringing on a professional CEO to steer the ship

Sangarné, who received an MBA from the prestigious INSEAD business school in France, is a telecommunications engineer by trade. Before landing at JOTA, he had 18 years of experience working for various international companies in the information technology sector and worked in 12 countries, including Spain and Portugal.

His MBA prepared him "to tackle projects in the world of journalism," as he told the **Knight Center**. And as he himself explained, his adventure at JOTA "is like the continuation" of that story. That MBA gave him "confidence to stay calm and make rational decisions and face any kind of problem."

JOTA was not Sangarne's first professional foray into the field of journalism; he previously participated in [BRIO](#), a Brazilian longform journalism project that did not work from a business perspective. There, Sangarné worked with Seligman and Mello, who were essential to the development of JOTA. According to Sangarné, the BRIO experience was a good lesson. "It is very important to have successes and failures," he said.

At JOTA, Sangarné was able to structure the company so that everyone felt comfortable, also from the shareholder point of view. JOTA "is not a company managed by one person," he said. "Nobody accumulates much power. In matters of management, I am the one with the final vote, but at the same time I would not dare to give my opinion on any content."

JOTA has tried "to build a good management model" in which decisions are made collectively, he said. Sangarné also believes that "the essential factor to attract people is not money" but other aspects, such as "doing things with sense."

One of the sites that inspired JOTA is Politico.com, the U.S. site that publishes stories on politics, some of which are behind a paywall. But as Felipe Seligman explained to the **Knight Center**, JOTA does not intend to copy models: "We do not want to be Politico. We want to be JOTA."

One of the first things Sangarne set out to do after arriving at JOTA was to increase subscriptions which initially were based on the personal relationships of the team members. Today they intend for the products to be more scalable and for them to be able to be sold more automatically.

JOTA is continuously reviewing the way it does business, with an eye toward improvement. "We do not set goals within a year, but we look more at quarterly targets," Sangarné explained. "And we put a lot of focus on learning."

Laura Diniz, a member of JOTA's founding team, believes that hiring Sangarne was a smart move. "We have to do things with customers in mind, not just do what we would like to do," she said, and this is an idea that the new CEO helped to consolidate.



*Marc Sangarné, CEO of JOTA  
(Courtesy)*

## A wide variety of products

One of the things that distinguishes JOTA from other sites is the [wide variety of information, products, and services](#) to which people can subscribe. It is a complete and varied a la carte service ranging from a basic individual subscription for 20 reais a month (just over US \$6)– which allows readers to view articles that are published on the web – to complete corporate services for companies that can reach 10,000 reais a month (just over US \$3,000).

Additionally, there are all kinds of products and services for 50 reais (about US \$15), 100 reais (slightly more than \$30), 350 reais (\$107.5), 1,500 reais (\$460) and other amounts in accordance with, for example, the type of service or the number of people in a company.

For example, JOTA offers daily or weekly specialized newsletters, alert services, poll results from Congress members, press clippings, analysis of specific topics or rankings of law firms, among other services.



*Laura Diniz, head of marketing and business development at JOTA  
(Courtesy)*

JOTA even offers a product in which customers can request information on demand. Diniz, who's responsible for business development, said that clients can ask JOTA to follow a specific topic of interest, and receive related news in their preferred format: email, WhatsApp or even by phone. The price varies depending on the difficulty of obtaining the information and the frequency with which the client wants to receive the messages.

## Evolution of income

Most of JOTA's income comes from subscriptions from companies and law firms, among other entities. JOTA doesn't share its subscriber and readership numbers, but Sangarné says the site has "thousands of individual subscribers and hundreds of corporate customers."

In 2014, after just four months in operation, JOTA generated revenue of 150,000 reais (about US \$46,000). In 2015, it reached 1 million reais (about \$310,000), a figure that tripled in 2016, when its revenue was 3 million reais (about \$920,000). This year, revenue is forecast between 5 and 6 million reais (between about \$1.5 and \$1.8 million), almost doubling the revenue of 2016.

JOTA has no traditional advertising income. Seligman explained that they only offer "JOTA Discute," a sort of branded content in which certain companies or institutions pay to be present in debate spaces. For example, Google is currently sponsoring a [space where freedom of expression is discussed](#).

## A long way to go

Though JOTA began its journey in 2014 with five people, by November 2017 the team consisted of 36 professionals, with women and men represented equally. It is a young team, with the average staffer being about 30 years of age.

Today, Seligman resides in Boston, where he is studying for an MBA at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). He explained to the **Knights Center** that he wants to learn what it means to run a company so he can contribute as much as possible to JOTA's development. Another team member, Mello, who is studying political science at UCLA, also lives in the U.S.



The site's monthly audience currently oscillates between half a million and one million unique users, depending on current affairs. Additionally, the company is consistently active on social networks where it has 145,000 followers on [Twitter](#) and 150,000 on [Facebook](#).

JOTA's central office is still in Brasília, but recently other areas of the company, such as Marketing, Sales, Analytics or Administration, have moved to São Paulo.

JOTA's newsroom is composed of 17 people, practically half of the staff.

The main protagonist of JOTA's first year was the content team, "which was key to establishing our credibility and brand as a media outlet," Sangarné explained. The administrative aspects gained prominence in the second year, while the Audience and Product areas saw important growth in the third year of activity.

But, JOTA's other areas are also led by professional journalists.

Diniz, for instance, worked for almost 15 years covering judicial issues in some of the main newsrooms in Brazil, such as newspaper O Estado de S. Paulo and magazine Veja. She also spent time at the head of the Brazilian Association of Investigative Journalism (Abraji). She joined the JOTA team a few months before the site launched at the request of Seligman and Felipe Recondo. Eventually, she was asked to open the site's operation in São Paulo.



One of the characteristics of the JOTA team is the versatility of its staff. In Diniz's case, when she started out, she was responsible for the technological part for a year. She then worked in sales and marketing, and is now specifically in charge of the Marketing and Business Development area, in which there are two other people who specialize in offline and digital marketing, respectively. She also writes an article from time to time, although that is not her main role.

Diniz explained that at JOTA, they work with their eyes "on the next year or in the next two years." According to her, they always try to understand "what we can do to help our clients in the short, medium and long-term and what is profitable, what we can do better than anyone else."

The people in charge of JOTA place special emphasis on caring for the company culture and on giving their employees opportunities for growth. There is a department dedicated specifically to this matter, led by Seligman.

JOTA plans to continue hiring professionals for all areas of the company during the coming months and hopes to maintain the company's growth. The pace of growth "will depend on the results of the multiple tests and pilot tests we are doing," Sangarné explained.

In terms of product development, the site tries to be as agile as possible. Always start with a pilot project that allows you to test the service. The results are analyzed quickly and, if they are positive, the product or service is launched.

Among the latest developments is the incorporation of a specialist in data journalism, one of the areas in which JOTA wants to grow.

The JOTA team believes that there is still a long way to go. For example, they can continue to expand the topics to be covered depending on the interests of current or future clients. As Diniz points out, there is a lot of room "for JOTA to be better known among all Brazilian lawyers and in all States." According to her, this is just the beginning.

## LESSONS

- Discover niche markets that need information that's unavailable, and offer them products and services with clear added value.
- Professionalize the leadership, management, administration and sales area of your company.
- Talk to your audience to learn their real needs. Users will pay for information and services that are truly relevant to their professional or personal life.
- Look for short-term objectives.
- Create a varied and flexible catalog of paid products and services that suit the needs of your audience.
- Streamline the development of new products.





*Like its design, sections of Nómada's news site do not have traditional titles. They include "Understanding politics," "We are all," "Where we come from," "Corruption is not normal," and more.*

# Nómada innovates journalism in Guatemala with bold aesthetics, progressive coverage and a creative business model

**By Carolina de Assis**  
*December 20, 2017*

At 34 years of age, 16 of them dedicated to journalism, Guatemalan Martín Rodríguez Pellecer can already count among his achievements the creation and establishment of two media outlets that have changed the journalistic panorama of his country.

Founded in 2011 and maintained by Rafael Landívar University (URL), [Plaza Pública](#) inaugurated a new tradition of investigative digital journalism committed to human rights in Guatemala. Three years after helping to launch that site, [Rodríguez left to embark on the adventure](#) of founding his own media outlet. After eight months of preparation, Nómada emerged in August 2014, anchored in journalistic principles of independence and transparency, as well as philosophical or social ideas like iconoclasm, optimism, aesthetics and feminism.

"I founded Nómada thinking of creating a media outlet that would help advance society towards a vanguard society, more transparent, more open to the world, more progressive, and to do it through journalism, the construction of community and innovation," Rodríguez told the **Knight Center**.

The lessons learned in the foundation of Plaza Pública and in the three years running the site were very well-applied in his new environment, Rodríguez said. "Without everything I learned at Plaza Pública, without the relationship with Rafael Landívar University, without that first experience of having

relationships with allies, of building bridges –and of breaking other bridges with journalistic investigations– Nómada would not be what it is today,” he explained.

With well-defined editorial coverage in sections dedicated to politics, corruption, urban and rural Guatemalan social issues, identity issues, feminism and sexuality, Nómada now has a staff of 20 and draws inspiration from such sites like North America’s Vox, Quartz and Vice, as well as El Faro of El Salvador and Colombia’s La Silla Vacía, to make journalism in a more fresh and direct way than traditional media sites, the founder and CEO explained.

“We try to have formats for a greater number of audiences, this is text, video, motion graphics, graphics, stories in Instagram, and in that sense we innovate in journalism,” he said.

But that’s not it: Nómada also innovates with its business model and in the diversity of sources of income to support its journalism. The promotion of events such as lectures, debates, festivals and fairs of artisanal products creates community among readers and brings partnerships with companies, which turn into income for the site. In addition, the excellent work of the audiovisual team has been placed at the service of companies from different sectors through a content agency created to strengthen Nómada’s financial inflows.



*Martín Rodríguez Pellecer, director and CEO of Nómada (Twitter)*

## **A fresh look**

Rodríguez’s first hire for Nómada embodies this bet on content presentation and innovation: graphic designer Lucía Menéndez, current CDO (chief design officer).

“Design is not only aesthetic, it is a way of seeing the world, an essential part of how narratives are presented,” Menéndez told the **Knight Center**. “The most important thing I do is to determine how the design and each format can contribute to better communicating each audio, interactive, photographic, video, motion-graphic, infographic, or text report. Another essential part is the innovation part. I am constantly forming the possibilities of the different platforms and ways of telling the stories.”

According to the CDO, the very design of Nómada’s pages and the visual identity of the site were created to connect with the ethos of the site.

“The freshness is reflected in the generous white space, in the daring way of combining different typographies, in the use of the color palette,” Menéndez explained. “The design has been quite innovative for Latin America. At the beginning, when the project came out, some people commented that it looked too ‘nice’ to be credible. But we show them that something can look good and be true. A few months after Nómada’s release, most media outlets in Guatemala redesigned their websites. Several collectives and media have imitated our graphic line.”

## **From corruption to feminism**

Alongside its innovation in areas of design and presentation, Nómada is grounded in thorough investigative reporting.

Earlier this year, Nómada’s journalists began looking into the [tragedy of Hogar Seguro](#), when in March 2017, a fire in a state shelter for children and adolescents outside Guatemala City left 41 girls dead. Nómada’s investigations [pointed to the responsibility of several state agents](#) in the case. The report was

recognized among [the best journalistic works of the year by the Gabriel García Márquez Journalism Award](#), which pointed out that the site's reporting was reviewed by the public prosecutor.

“In three years, [Nómada has managed to awaken our consciences](#) and has carried out investigations so that some criminals end up in jail,” the award said at the time.

Nómada was also [one of the journalistic outlets in Guatemala that played a central role](#) in the fall and detention of then-president, Otto Pérez Molina, and his deputy, Roxana Baldetti, in 2015 for involvement in a corruption scheme investigated by the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) and the country's public prosecutor.

The so-called "Guatemalan spring" –in reference to the mass protests in Guatemala City calling for Pérez Molina's resignation– shook the country and renewed public interest in investigative stories about the shameless actions of the powerful. Nómada continues to dedicate itself to covering the political crisis in the country, now governed by [President Jimmy Morales](#), who also [does not pass unscathed by the site's investigative team](#).

If coverage of the innards of public power is what is expected of a journalistic milieu committed to transparency, the adoption of feminism as principle and north of journalism produced by Nómada also makes sense for a site that proposes to help improve the society of which it is a part, as explained by Rodríguez.



*The team at Nómada celebrates its third anniversary (Facebook)*

“We claim that we are a feminist media outlet because we believe that the epidemic of violence against women and the obstruction of the development of their lives with all rights are such, that we believe we must pay special attention to guarantee the rights of women,” Nómada's director said. “And it is such an important battle for our generation that we believe that we should remind readers all the time, and we must remind ourselves that we have that debt as a society that we must fulfill.”

Translating this commitment into journalistic work involves dedicating much of the site to coverage and investigations on [women's rights](#) and [sexual and reproductive rights](#). The most recent example of this engagement was the creation of [Volcánica](#), “a magazine of Latin American blogs and opinion about feminism,” according to Rodríguez. The new publication is edited by Colombian journalist Catalina Ruíz-Navarro, who is based in Mexico City.

The magazine, according to what the editor told the **Knight Center**, is aimed “at Latin America’s millennial community” and “seeks to be a space to raise transnational and cross-sectional debates on all contemporary feminism themes, such as indigenous feminism, decolonial feminism, Afro-feminism, land and territory, sex work, transfeminism and other themes.”



A recognized feminist activist in the region, Ruíz-Navarro said she wants Volcánica to be more than a traditional digital magazine.

The editor’s intention is “to engage Latin American feminist millennials in a regional conversation that allows us to do to advocacy, activism, get acquainted and familiarize ourselves with different themes of feminisms that may be alien to our immediate surroundings and that allows us to connect and empathize with other feminists in the region,” Ruíz-Navarro said. “In this way, we can better organize ourselves and begin to weave networks that give us strength to do activism in the region and in each one of our countries.”

“Nómada is one of the few media sites that assumes a feminist viewpoint from the beginning and this is a very important political position,” the Colombian journalist said. “The birth of Volcánica shows that Nómada wants to take that feminist position to the end, they are opening a space for community and discussion.”

For Ruíz-Navarro, this space is even more important because of what she perceives as a [negative reaction to the advance of the feminist movement](#) in public debate in recent years.

“On the one hand, there are many journalistic publications that are becoming more openly progressive and activist, but they are very few,” she said. “I think it’s the opposite: the spaces are closing, and we are in a generalized moment of backlash in the movement where preserving spaces that claim to be committed to being feminists, such as Nómada and Volcánica, is of vital importance.”

Rodríguez, the founder and director of Nómada, said the site is activist in two fields: transparency and feminism. “The fact that we are activists for the rights of women or for transparency of media does not make us a less journalistic media outlet,” he said.

“We are part of the generation of journalists who believe that making our ideology transparent makes our readers more demanding. But it makes us journalists who, beyond the search to promote an ideology, are searching for the truth,” Rodríguez said.



## Financing, content for companies and events

Nómada is part of a generation of digital native media in the region that has innovated not only in format and content, but also in ways of sustaining itself— perhaps the main concern of journalists wanting to create their own ventures.

Before starting Nómada, Rodríguez said he spent three years learning from Open Society Foundation grantees and from the Knight Center's [International Symposium on Online Journalism \(ISOJ\)](#). "I found that a mixed model of grants for investigative journalism along with a commercial area, could be the most useful, most attractive," he explained.

This mixed model consists of an S.A. with 20 members [whose names are public](#). Among them are Menéndez, CDO of Nómada; Luis von Ahn, Guatemalan founder and CEO of the language teaching platform [Duolingo](#); and the [Coordination of NGOs and Cooperatives of Guatemala](#) (Congcoop). Each shareholder has between 1 percent and 2 percent of the shares —with the exception of Rodríguez, a founding shareholder— initially worth U.S. \$10,000 each. Rodríguez is also the chairman of the Nómada Board of Directors and the members are part of the administration secretariat.

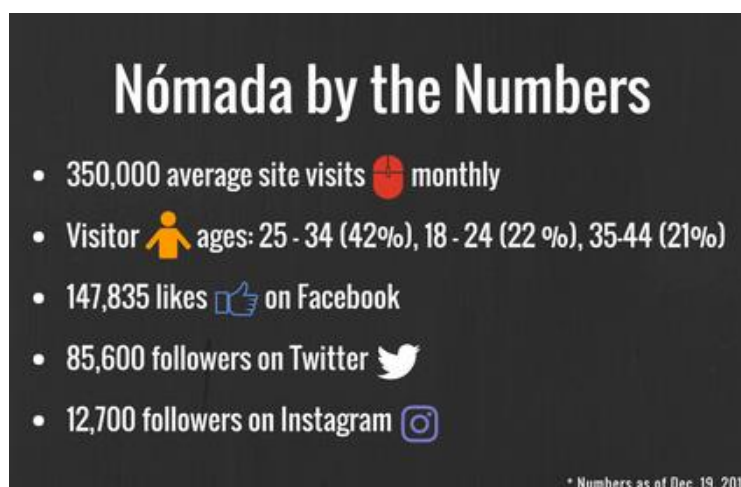
In addition to the partners' investments, the initial capital of Nómada came from a U.S. \$350,000 bank loan contracted by Rodríguez. From that point on, Nómada started to count on international funders of investigative journalism around the world such as the Ford Foundation, Hivos, the Open Society Foundation, Free Press Unlimited and Planned Parenthood. These sources accounted for 55 percent of Nómada's total budget in 2017, which stood at around \$650,000, Rodríguez told the Knight Center. The remaining 45 percent comes from "[advertising and event partnership](#)" sales, sales of shares and [capital] in credit."

"The assessment [of the business model] is somewhere between harsh and positive," the founder said. "Harsh because it is not easy to start a media outlet and above all it is not easy to maintain a level of cash flow in the first three years as in any start up that begins with credit. And positive because we hope that next year, between grants, commercial sales, and the content agency that we began in this quarter, we can reach a point of equilibrium."

The Nueve agency was founded based on Nómada's experience forming partnerships with companies from various sectors to produce journalistic content. Among them are [cbc - The Central America Bottling Corporation](#), which sponsors the [Perfiles](#) series, featuring videos about cultural initiatives in Guatemala, and the Chinese technology company Huawei, which sponsors the site's [Travel Guide section](#).

According to Lucía Menéndez, partnerships with companies have been successful for the site and for its readers. "For Nómada, it is a part of the profitable and innovative business model. And for our readers, it's always interesting content," she said.

The agency, however, intends to go beyond journalism and produce commercial content for companies with an initiative inspired by North American media and Ecuadorian site [GK](#), Rodríguez said. The content for companies will not have "the Nómada logo, but will have the quality of motion graphics and videos from Nómada, to provide us with another source of income," he said.



The founder of the Guatemalan website highlights [another lesson from ISOJ](#): the production of events as community building and as a source of income for journalistic media. With this goal in mind, Nómada has combined academic events such as debates and lectures, and playful events such as parties and street fairs, Rodríguez said.

Among the first was [TEDx Media Ninjas](#), which brought journalists from various countries in the region to Guatemala City in March 2016 to talk about innovation and digital journalism, and the DIXIT, conferences with experts who reflect on what they have learned over the course of their careers. In 2017, the topics covered were "[Women with Power](#)" and "[Technology for change](#)," always with sponsorship.



*Nómada organizes special events, like the cultural fair Barrio Nómada, to raise funds for the site. (Facebook)*

Among the playful events are [Nómada's themed birthday parties](#) – such as [this year's Halloween bash](#) – and fairs for brands and artisan crafts such as the recent [Barrio Nómada](#) and [Sexo Avenida - Mercadillo Erótico](#). All events are open to partnerships with institutions and companies that want to sponsor them in some way, and among those who have participated are Hyundai, Stella Artois and the U.S. and Mexican embassies.

“Most events are profitable,” Menéndez said. “Our commercial alliances also build brand identity. This contributes to the ‘Nómada brand.’ It also allows us to get to know our community firsthand and have a personal approach. Having such closeness to our community through the events is quite unusual in Guatemala. The entire Nómada team is always present at parties, often at the entrance greeting the attendees.”

In addition to these sources of income, Nómada also recently launched a crowdfunding campaign, [“Periodismo por vos”](#) (Journalism for you). According

to the site's director, the goal is for this mode of income to account for 10 percent of Nómada's total funding.

“The key, as in all businesses, and this is part of the learning I have had in these four years...is that to ensure the lasting prosperity of the business we have to think about a large number of sources of income,” Rodríguez said.

In this sense, Nómada will soon have a new general manager, a professional with experience with business development and who will help increase sales and obtain new financing. According to Rodríguez, “these are the two biggest challenges: how to grow and how to innovate.”

“Nómada tries to be a media outlet that is very rigorous and very political, tries to take life a little less seriously, and tries a vocation more oriented to service for the community of readers in the sense that we want to do everything possible to inform society,” Rodríguez said. “For this, we have to leave our comfort zone of text to make videos, graphics, motion graphics, forums, and everything we can, and we have to invest a lot in design and a commercial model and we have to borrow 350 thousand dollars, let's do it.”

All this without losing the playful spirit that characterizes Nómada, the founder of the site said: “I think that this vocation is a lesson, too, and I think another lesson is that life can be trying to change the world from Monday to Friday, and enjoying life from Friday to Sunday.”

# LESSONS



- Explore formats and platforms available online: in addition to text and video, infographics, GIFs and social media "stories" broaden the reach of information.
- Value design: your content must have beautiful and functional presentation that serves the information being offered to the public.
- Be transparent: By clarifying your political positions, priorities and organization as a journalistic media outlet, your audience has the chance to better understand the context in which your content is produced and has more tools to interpret it.
- Diversify your sources of income: financial sustainability is not dependent on only one source of income.
- Event promotion is a good way to strengthen ties with your readers, to build a community that transcends the digital, and also raise funds for your journalism.
- Consider partnerships with companies, which can be in the form of production of informational or commercial content and also in the promotion of events.



*Chequeado created a game to explain findings of local reports and took it on the road to plazas around the country. (Facebook)*

# How Argentinian innovators created Chequeado and made it a global leader in fact-checking

**By Ismael Nafría**  
*January 10, 2018*

It was a sunny day in May when members of the Chequeado team [carefully laid out a large board game in Plaza Moreno in La Plata, Argentina](#). The whole scene had an air of whimsy: dice that require two hands to hold, icons that stood 4 feet tall and circus performers that called passersby to try their hand at the fact-checking site's version of "La Oca," or the Game of the Goose.

But, there was something more important beneath the fun and games. The board told the story of the progress (or lack thereof) behind public works in the city three years after a historic flood. The findings were a result of journalistic investigations by Chequeado, some local media outlets and journalists, and a hackathon that counted on participation from neighbors, engineers, programmers and high school students.

During the month, the same process was repeated in the plazas of four other cities around the country, focusing on local problems. The results of the traditional journalistic investigations were also published by local media.



The project, produced with support from the United Nations Fund for Democracy, was one of the site's biggest so far, according to Chequeado project coordinator Olivia Sohr. The fact-checking site, now in its seventh year, is "always trying to think of new ways to present information so that it is more accessible and reaches the whole world," she explained.

This kind of innovative presentation and rigorous investigation is what has made Chequeado, the pioneering fact-checking site in Latin America, a reference and teacher for data verification in the region and around the world.

"Chequeado is a remarkable organization. They were among the first digital fact-checking projects around the world and can now be considered one of the global leaders," Alexios Mantzarlis, director of the International Fact-Checking Network, told the **Knight Center**. "They have continuously innovated their formats, channels and approaches in order to seek the greatest possible impact for the benefit of their cause: increasing accuracy in the public sphere."

The Argentine site, launched in October 2010, has become the great promoter of a journalistic gamble that has been rapidly gaining prominence and now counts almost 15 media from different Latin American countries among its ranks.

## The Founding Fathers

The history of Chequeado's birth is atypical, in large part because its three founders do not fit the profile expected for this kind of journalistic project: they were not journalists, they didn't come from the world of politics, and they did not have experience in the nonprofit sector.

They were three professionals – a physicist, Julio Aranovich; an economist, José Alberto Bekinschtein, and a chemist, Roberto Lugo– already veterans in their fields, over 60 years old and either about to retire or already there. All three had studied and lived for years outside of Argentina, but as director Laura Zommer explains it, they "were consumers with a need not satisfied by traditional media; informed citizens who identified a deficiency."

Olivia Sohr, who was Chequeado's first employee and is currently the site's project director, told the **Knight Center** that Aranovich "lived in the United States for a long time, where he started his professional career, and where he learned about FactCheck.org." When he returned to Argentina, he thought that an initiative like that "could work very well" in his country at a time –the year was 2009 and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner was president– in which the political and communication environment was very rarefied. "According to what they read in Argentina," added Zommer, "they were told about two very different Argentinas." And that was not very acceptable for professionals who came from the scientific world.

Sohr, who received her education in sociology, came to the site after only brief incursions into journalism. Chequeado was interesting for two reasons: "the challenge of starting something from scratch," she explains, and "the idea of helping build a richer public debate" based on verifiable data and not only on opinions that are not contested. "That spirit of Chequeado – Sohr added – which was the strong idea of the founders, is that if we want a citizenship that participates actively in democracy, we need for them to be informed with basic data to be able to arm their opinions."

Sohr and [Matías Di Santi](#) –now the newsroom coordinator – created a closed blog in November 2009 "where we started to try out the first articles, to see how the tone came across, to show it to friends, to see whether it worked..." Sohr explained. Almost a year later, in October 2010, Chequeado was officially launched with a team of five people.

A little more than a year and a half after its public launch, the site went through a crucial episode for its future: the incorporation of a director with extensive journalistic experience.

Journalist and lawyer [Laura Zommer](#) has been the executive and journalistic director of Chequeado since May 2012, although she had been in contact with the project for quite some time before.

Zommer studied Communication and Law and has been teaching for two decades at the University of Buenos Aires on the right to information, with a focus on access to information and open data. At age 22, she started at newspaper La Nación, where she covered judicial issues, civil rights, corruption and



*Laura Zommer speaks during Latam Chequea, a regional fact-checking event sponsored by Chequeado (Facebook)*

transparency in politics, among other topics. After a temporary stint as chief of staff at the Ministry of Internal Security, she returned to La Nación and also started working as communications director at Argentine think tank CIPPEC. It was there that she learned about Chequeado and fell in love with the project.

Despite having a small editorial team when Chequeado launched publicly in October 2010, the founders kept Zommer informed of their progress to get her opinion and because there was a mutual conviction that "sooner or later I would go to work with them," Zommer explained.

According to Zommer, a former CIPPEC fundraising director that Chequeado hired as a consultant told them "that people support, in addition to good ideas, people who can carry them out." The problem with Chequeado was two-pronged: on the one hand, its promoters were already very veteran people; on the other, its journalistic team was too young, even if it was brilliant. To get money, they had to hire a director, "and that's when I came in," Zommer said.

The bet had its economic risks, but Zommer explains that she accepted the challenge because "I was quite convinced that I wanted to return to journalism and none of the Argentine journalism spaces had the freedom that I expected to work with."

Since joining the company, Zommer has been in charge of executive management combined with journalistic coordination, hoping to be able to focus one day exclusively on journalism.

Her first goals: to make Chequeado independent from its founders, increase its impact and make it more professional.

## **The growth of Chequeado**

Making Chequeado a more professional project involved many things, for example, establishing a rigorous work method and sharing it with users and other sites interested in data verification. Also, it involved better defining the type of checks to be carried out, improving the presentation formats or growing the team with professionals who had new skills.

The site was born with two very young journalists with little professional experience. As Sohr explains, "it was very hard to go out and say that what the president says is false." So from the beginning, to gain the credibility of the public, they applied great transparency to their work. They developed a method that, when Zommer arrived, was put in writing and published on the site for everyone to see. "The method at Chequeado," Sohr added, "helped us to better organize what were already doing. If we followed all the steps, it would be difficult to make a big mistake."

Now, that fact-checking method has been shared with sites around the world. It is also used by Chequeado at checkathons and by its teams of volunteers –students, or graduates of communications, economics, law or political science, who are trained by Chequeado and help with investigations.

The current Chequeado team consists of 16 professionals (right now there are 15, but there is an open search to hire a new editor). It is a young team. Three people are over 30 years old, but the rest are under 30 and Chequeado has been their first job in many cases. "We have a small team but it's very efficient, very good," Zommer said.

Checks, daily articles or explanations are the central part of the site's journalistic work. This is the central devotion of the newsroom, which consists of about six people, although most of the team collaborates in the daily work in one way or another. As explained on the site, "we check the statements of politicians, economists, businessmen, public figures, media and other opinion-forming institutions, and classify them as 'true' to 'false' according to how consistent they are with the facts and data to which they refer." Chequeado also works with outside journalists for certain projects from time to time.

"Whether it is through their GIFS, their wildly successful educational programs, or their live debate visualizations, Chequeado always has the user (the informed citizen) in mind," said Mantzarlis, of the IFCN. "Besides that, they have been generous in supporting new fact-checking projects across Latin America."

## Investing in innovation

The site's bet on finding new ways to inform the public is most apparent in its designation of an innovation director.

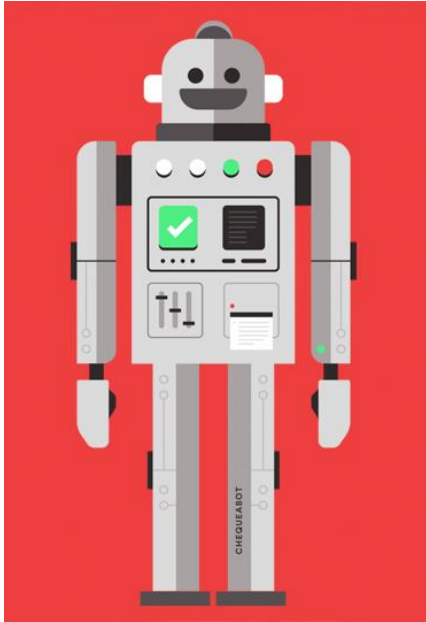
[Pablo M. Fernández](#) started working in media in 2002 at 20 years old, covering technology issues. After serving in leadership roles at magazines Information Technology and Apertura, working as homepage manager at La Nación, and completing a brief stint at venture ElMeme, Fernández joined Chequeado in 2015, first serving as coordinator of innovation and moving up to director a year later. He is, in practice, the number two of the Chequeado team.

**THE THREE LEGS OF CHEQUEADO**

- CHEQUEADO MEDIA** ✓  
Fact-checking website + alliances with other media + presence on social networks
- CHEQUEADO EDUCATION** ✓  
Raising society's awareness about the importance of facts and reliable data, as well as helping citizens develop a critical spirit. Includes the site's online courses and in-person workshops.
- CHEQUEADO INNOVATION** ✓  
Developing new technological developments and searching for new formats

*Chequeado has three main areas of focus: Chequeado Media, Chequeado Innovation and Chequeado Education.*

One of the innovation team's main challenges is to "think in terms of new formats" to present the information and reach a wider audience while "maintaining journalistic quality," as Fernández explained to the **Knight Center**. In addition, it also develops technological tools to make Chequeado content more attractive.



*Chequeabot (Courtesy)*

But one of the most innovative fields in which the Chequeado innovation team is working is artificial intelligence and the use of algorithms to automate tasks. "We are creating [an automated checking system](#) that will help us to check faster. It is our own development with open tools. It's called Chequeabot," Fernández explained. The name was chosen by the user community from several options proposed by the Chequeado team.

Each day this tool locates checkable phrases from about 30 media outlets and presents them at a weekly newsroom meeting, "as if it were a journalist," Fernández said. In this way, the Chequeado team can review more media sites, especially from areas of Argentina that were not previously covered. Chequeabot produces a ranking of the phrases that it considers most testable. "Generally speaking, it is correct," Fernández said, "but it also has an automatic learning component" since the editorial team can indicate whether it was right or wrong.

The technology that the Chequeado innovation team is developing also allows it to gain speed. "The robot," Fernández explained, "lets us know when it finds a similar phrase that we already checked. In real time. That is a great plus." Thus, the team can react with great speed and "that generates a lot of visits, a lot of engagement."

The Chequeado director is also convinced that they need to be as fast as possible. "The content generators are always going to be faster than us," Zommer argues "because it is easier to invent than to inform." She added: "Just as they use technology for viralization, we have to be able to use artificial intelligence in all the checking processes where we can do without humans." Fernández adds that this "will allow humans to focus on the part of explaining and putting the data in context; things that artificial intelligence still doesn't do better than us."

Another function of the Chequeado bot, which is still in development, is to provide the best possible data on a current topic. For example, if the president of the country talks about poverty, the robot can present the journalist with the best data available on that subject.

The team is very clear that this robot will be an important aid, but will never have the last word. That will always belong to the editorial team.

Independent of the technological work based on algorithms, perhaps the clearest –or at least the most daring– example of innovations in format Chequeado has produced so far has been the presentation of results in the form of animated GIFs. This was a project [done in collaboration with Argentine media outlet UNO](#), which is primarily aimed at millennials and is totally geared toward mobile phones and social networks. Zommer explains that "readership of the original articles that have GIFs increases because they circulate more."

Fernández, explained that "it was quite revolutionary for Chequeado because we had been working in a very rigid manner." The practice of presenting a summary of the checks through animated illustrations "worked great," he said. It also worked because "a lot of people read us on social networks," and for a non-profit media outlet like Chequeado "it is very important to reach people through networks, even if they stay there."



## Chequeado's business model

Chequeado is part of the La Voz Pública Foundation for the verification of public discourse, a non-profit organization. The diversification of income channels is one of the keys to its business model. The site [has four main sources of income](#).

The most important, by volume, is international cooperation, which in 2017 represented 59 percent of total revenue. According to Zommer, each year Chequeado counts on between nine and 13 grants or institutional donations. The main ones are from the Omidyar Network and Open Society Foundations, but they've also received aid from the embassies of New Zealand, Canada, the Netherlands, Great Britain and the United States, as well as other entities.

The second source of income is from companies (17 percent in 2017). As a strategic decision, Chequeado does not offer advertising on its pages. The help of companies comes through events such as "La Noche de Chequeado," the site's main fundraising event that is held every year on the Monday before Journalist's Day (June 7).

Companies pay to be present in order to expand brand recognition among journalists, academics and social leaders in attendance. Participation has increased every year (around 350 journalists attended in 2017). There are also companies that support particular projects of the Chequeado [Education](#) or [Innovation](#) programs.

Chequeado's own activities are the third source of income (14 percent in 2017). Zommer believes that non-profit organizations such as Chequeado must "be able to monetize the social capital they generate." In its case, for example, they receive income for the publication of Chequeado content in other media or for the realization of online courses.

Finally, individual donations represent 10 percent of total income. They range from US \$5 per month to US \$10,000 per year, the latter of which is donated by the founder and CEO of e-commerce website Mercado Libre, Marcos Galperin. Currently, there are about 400 individual donors and the number increases year after year.

At the moment, although "there are years that are calmer than others," Zommer explained, "we are balanced." During those years, they managed to gain a surplus on a couple occasions.

The site receives approximately 300,000 monthly visits, but according to Zommer, its "audience exceeds one million people" when all the platforms and media in which its content is present are taken into account. "And surely," she adds, "among that million are all the politicians, academics and relevant journalists" of Argentina.

In terms of audience, the main jump took place during the first presidential debate in Argentina in 2015. "Traffic grew 700 percent that year, and then our challenge was not to lose it," Zommer said.

But, one of the great –and most difficult– challenges that the Chequeado team currently faces is to measure its impact. It is not simply about knowing how many clicks a given story achieves, how a topic circulates through social networks, or how many times a particular work is cited in other media. That's



*Chequeado works with Argentina media outlet UNO to share its fact-checking through animated GIFs. (Chequeado)*

important, but those responsible for the project want to go much further to "work on the things that really have the most impact" on society, as Olivia Sohr explained.



*Noche de Chequeado (Facebook)*

It's a project the team is constantly working on, on several fronts. For example, they conduct surveys and focus groups with the audience. They also participate in the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN) –Chequeado is part of its steering committee–, where common tools are developed that can be used by the different organizations that are part of the network "to make it cheaper for all and also to be able to later compare the impact achieved with these tools in different places."

Taking stock of the first seven years of the site, director Laura Zommer reflects on the site's achievements. They've developed a financial model that permits

quality journalism, they've established a brand associated with trust and they've created a very self-demanding team that works to hold people accountable.

But Zommer still sees room for improvement. They need to figure out how to better disseminate their research and to take a closer look at what Chequeado produces, not moving so quickly to the next project.

The excitement that's felt among the Chequeado team regarding the possibilities offered by data verification, along with its permanent commitment to innovation, foretell a bright future for this project. Don't take our word for it. Check it out for yourself.

# LESSONS

- The innovative spirit must be present at all times at a digital media outlet. It's always good to consider new challenges.
- Transparency is essential for a digital journalistic project. Users should have a good understanding of exactly what the media outlet contributes to society.
- It is essential to think of appropriate formats to get the information in the most effective way possible.
- You must diversify revenue streams so that a digital media outlet's business model is sustainable.
- Local cases have a large impact on the population. You have to find formulas to connect with the local public and present the information in an original way, both online and offline.
- It's very important to know the site's true impact. It is the best way to demonstrate its effectiveness.

# Lessons in innovation from Salvadoran site El Faro start with a focus on quality journalism

By Ismael Nafria  
January 24, 2018



The Nov. 21, 2016 edition of The New York Times featured a story from El Faro's investigative team, Sala Negra. (Screenshot)

these years. According to its founder and first director, today El Faro is "a consolidated media outlet" that "has an international reach that we never suspected it would have, and that is a good starting point for the future."

The [front page](#) of the Nov. 21, 2016 print edition of The New York Times is a good example of that international reach. The page led with a report about violent gangs in El Faro's home country: "Tin-Cup Gangs of El Salvador."

During the previous eight months, teams from El Faro and The New York Times [worked together to research and edit the broad and forceful report](#) that was published simultaneously in [English](#) and [Spanish](#).

When journalists at Salvadoran site El Faro see their stories published on the cover of The New York Times or Univision's homepage, it's recognition of the organization's almost 20-year-long dedication to investigative journalism and quality online information.

Journalist Carlos Dada and businessman Jorge Simán launched the digital native media pioneer in Latin America in May 1998, years before a majority of the digital native sites now operating in the region. Two decades later, it has become an inescapable reference for journalism in Central America and a model that has inspired other digital native media that have emerged in other countries in the region in recent years.

"In journalistic terms, we are well above our best expectations, without a doubt," Dada told the **Knight Center** when taking stock of



The current director of El Faro, Spanish journalist José Luis Sanz, explained to the **Knigh Center** that this project with The Times challenged and placed professional "demands" on his team. At the same time, he also noted that it was a "validation of the journalistic standards" applied by El Faro's editorial staff.

Just a few months before, [El Faro won the Recognition of Excellence award](#) granted by the Gabriel García Márquez Foundation for New Ibero-American Journalism (FNPI, for its initials in Spanish), which until then had only been awarded to individual journalists.

More recently, the Salvadoran digital site repeated the experience of working and publishing jointly with a large U.S.-based media outlet, in this case with Univision. "[From migrants to refugees: the new Central American drama](#)" was an extensive four-part multimedia report, which was published during the four weeks of October 2017 (view at: [Univision](#) | [El Faro](#)). And as in the case of the NYT, the report was published in both Spanish and [English](#) to reach the widest audience possible.

## The modest beginnings of El Faro

The history of El Faro, translated in English as The Lighthouse, dates back to the end of the 1990s. Published by the Salvadoran company Trípode, El Faro was founded in 1998 by Dada and Simán, who were the company's sole shareholders for 16 years.

"El Faro has its origin in the exile of its two founders," Dada explained to the **Knigh Center**. Dada and Simán's families went into exile to Mexico when they were children. After the war, the two returned to El Salvador. Outside they had seen a type of journalism that was different from what was happening in their country: "Someday, when we are both in El Salvador, we should open a newspaper," Dada said they told each other. And that's what they decided to do in 1997.

The lack of economic resources made it unthinkable to launch a print publication, so they opted to "try on the internet" despite very poor digital development in El Salvador. In fact, [according to data](#) from the International Telecommunications Union (UIT), El Salvador continues to be the second lowest ranked country for internet penetration in Latin America (only 16.9 percent of households have access to the internet and just under 30 percent of the population uses the internet).

The beginnings of El Faro were very modest, as Sanz explained. Having just finished his studies, the Spanish journalist worked at a local television station before he moved to El Salvador to join the Sunday magazine *Vértice*, published by one of the two main newspapers in the country, *El Diario de Hoy*. After a couple of years at the magazine, Dada invited him to work at El Faro in 2001.

"At the time, El Faro was a very small media outlet, but it was already starting to make noise," Sanz said. In those early years, Dada and Sanz were the only professional journalists at the site. The rest were journalism or communications students, some of whom, like Carlos Martínez, Sergio Arauz or Daniel Valencia, are now among the newsroom's veterans.



*The El Faro newsroom (Courtesy)*

One of the keys to El Faro's survival is that being sustainable "was not an obsession" in those first years, as its current director explained. "If the journalistic course of the project had depended in any measure on the search for sustainability, I believe that El Faro not only would not be what it is today, but I doubt very much that it would have survived," Sanz said. "Part of the fact that El Faro continues to exist is that during the first years no one took a penny," Dada confirmed.

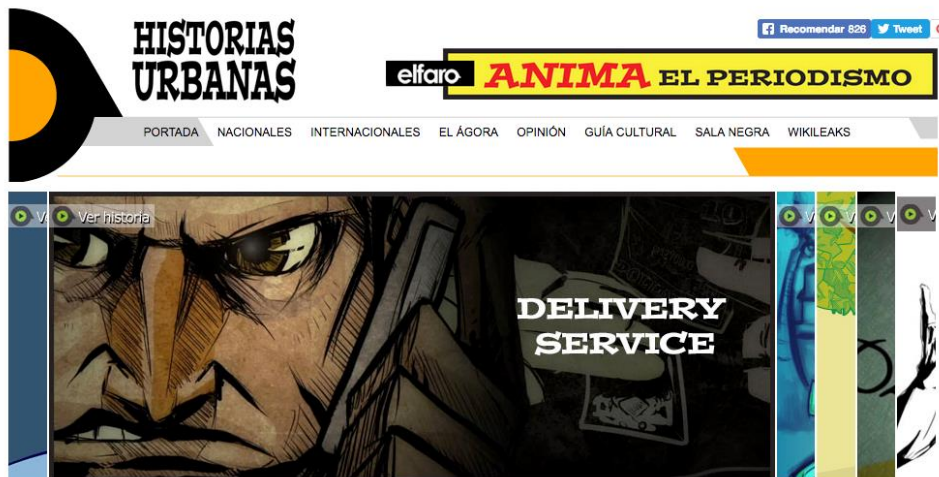
The current director of El Faro believes that if now "it is difficult to survive or maintain yourself as a small or medium-sized media outlet," it was "unthinkable" 20 years ago. "We never considered restraining, adapting or conditioning our approach for economic or strategic reasons," Sanz added.

But there came a time when that situation became untenable. El Faro began competing journalistically with traditional media outlets that employed its own contributors. "We saw ourselves in urgent need of being able to pay salaries to journalists," Sanz said. So in 2003, El Faro began to professionalize little by little.

The team grew over the years, thanks in part to increased aid from various entities, advertising revenue and the exploration of new revenue streams. Today, the team consists of 30 people in total. The newsroom is composed of 22 professionals, including reporters, a developer, a designer, two photojournalists, an audiovisual journalist, two editors and a social media manager.

## Journalistic innovation

Investigative journalism has always been El Faro's main brand. Its founder, Carlos Dada, likes to explain that the site's "virtue" is journalism, rather than innovation or technologies. But, that does not rule out a



desire to explore, while at the same time keeping quality journalism front and center.

"We are very excited to continue experimenting with new narratives, which has been a part of what we do without leaving our DNA," Dada said.

Innovation at El Faro, for example, means "breaking the false barrier between

investigative journalism and narrative journalism," explained current director José Luis Sanz. "Claiming narrative journalism" to explain complex issues, such as those related to migration, violence or impunity "also seems to me to be an important contribution," Sanz added.

The "collaborative dynamics," both internal and with other media, are also part of the innovative way of working that El Faro wants to promote, according to its leader. And the aforementioned examples of reports with The New York Times and Univision are good references. "For a media outlet as economically fragile as El Faro to develop coverage that is so long, done over months, with media like The Times or Univision, I think it opens the way for other media to think in other ways," Sanz said.

Additionally, according to its director, El Faro "is constantly exploring formulas to narrate and explain more complex issues in a more complete way." Thus, throughout its history, it has carried out several projects with innovative formats. One of the most relevant projects, which was ambitious for its experimentation with audiovisual storytelling, was "[Historias Urbanas](#)" (Urban Stories), a series of animated journalistic short stories published in 2010 that combined journalistic chronicles, illustration and music.

"How do you make something digestible if you mix seven journalists, a theater director, 25 musicians, seven illustrators, two animators and an editor?" This is the question asked in the introduction to this original journalistic project. The answer was six shorts, born after a year of collaborative and multidisciplinary work, that tell six real stories based in the city of San Salvador. Among the protagonists are a gang member, a taxi driver who traffics drugs and a self-made man.

According to Óscar Luna, current head of [El Faro TV](#) and [El Faro Radio](#) and the main driver behind "Historia Urbanas," it is a project that "we did very early," but "it was a good experiment."

One of the special projects coordinated by Luna that has had a strong impact on Salvadoran society is [El Faro's snapshot of the country's educational system](#). This project was born due to the "constant failures" in school placement tests. "Nobody had offered an analysis, an examination of the sector," Luna explained. Twenty variables were analyzed in more than 5,000 public schools in the country and expert diagnoses were offered. In addition, the project takes the reader on a visual tour through various key schools using text, audio and video. "We are looking for ways to renew it again this year," the coordinator said.

The team at El Faro used another creative approach to tackle a different social issue, the relationship between inequality and urban space. In its interactive project "[Un retrato de desigualdad](#)" (A portrait of inequality), El Faro asked for the collaboration of 24 teenagers –12 with higher economic resources and 12 with less means– and over the span of a month followed all their movements in San Salvador through their mobile phones. Luna explains the study confirmed the two groups did not overlap in physical spaces, with only two exceptions: "to eat pupusas –a traditional food of El Salvador–, where they could coexist in the same town, Antiguo Cuscatlán, and to play on the fast soccer courts."

El Faro is preparing the publication of another special, entitled "Poder(es)" (Power(s)), in which it will exhaustively monitor the activity of El Salvador's congress members. Luna explained that this ambitious journalistic project, which has its own funding, counts on the talents of a seven-member team. Poder(es) will offer information, graphics and open data and will monitor the congress members throughout the legislative session.

## **The challenge of financing**

El Faro's budget for 2018 is around U.S. \$1.1 million, Sanz said. It will therefore be somewhat higher than the previous year's budget of \$945,000. "More than 75 percent of this budget is invested in newsroom and reporting costs," Sanz explained. During the last two years, El Faro managed to reach economic equilibrium.

But, where does the money come from? El Faro has four income channels. The main one, which accounts for 75 percent of the total, comes from international organizations such as Open Society Foundations. The sale of advertising and sponsorships represents approximately 17 percent of revenue. The other two income streams are the annual campaign #ExcavaciónCiudadana, which represents 4 percent of the total, and the sale of content to other media outlets or royalties for books and documentary films, which contribute 3 percent of the total.

In 2015, the people in charge of El Faro decided to launch the crowdfunding campaign [#ExcavaciónCiudadana](#) (Citizen Excavation), in which they asked readers and allies from El Salvador or anywhere in the world for small economic contributions to help sustain the project. In its first two years,

nearly 900 people contributed around U.S. \$57,000, which has been used to produce more than 50 specific journalistic projects (chronicles, reports, photo essays or audiovisual pieces).

The community members who donate are offered time and space to talk with the El Faro team members so they can explain their work.



Cristina Algarra, who is responsible for El Faro's offline activities, said that one of the essential elements of the #ExcavaciónCiudadana project is that it helps to "generate a community." "What we are looking for is a community that supports the work of El Faro, that helps us sustain the media outlet," she explained.

The most ambitious task Algarra coordinates during the year is the [Central American Journalism Forum](#) (ForoCAP), which will celebrate its eighth edition this year from May 14 to 19. The annual event, which is organized in the city of San Salvador and has activities in a couple cities in the interior, has three basic objectives, according to Algarra.

The first is the specialized training of journalists through workshops, conferences with international guests and themed meetings.

The second objective is to "generate spaces for dialogue and debate with citizens," Algarra said. This is one of El Faro's challenges: "to reach new people" and do it through innovative formats. One of these "innovative formats" is the [Data Art exhibition](#), which, as its name implies, turns data

journalism into works of art. The project arose at the beginning of 2017 as a collaboration between El Faro and the Luis Poma Theater in San Salvador based on the piece "Brecha" by data journalist and artist [Daniel Villatoro](#). "Brecha," or Gap, shows four watches that reflect labor inequality between men and women, and the indigenous and non-indigenous populations in Guatemala.

Data Art, which mixes journalism with all types of artist work, is an continuously-growing exhibition that focuses on issues such as violence, disappearances, rape of minors or inequality. In addition to being present at ForoCAP, the project has traveled to different countries in Latin America such as Costa Rica, Honduras and Brazil, as well as around El Salvador.

And finally, ForoCAP also aims to train readers, who are invited to participate in workshops, conferences, round tables and similar activities.

Last year, more than 3,000 people participated in the different ForoCAP events, some of which are held in collaboration with various universities in the country.

## Plans for the future

What can we expect from El Faro in the immediate future? According to its director, there are plans to expand the topics and geographic locations they cover.

"The level of demand that we have from Salvadoran society and readers is very high," Sanz said, adding this implies that some issues not covered before must now be part of the media's offerings. "The thematic range has been growing year after year," the director explained.



Currently the site covers ten thematic areas: politics, migration, gangs, violence, transparency, organized crime, inequality, impunity, culture and historical memory. The team's intention is to expand these areas with topics such as economic or financial power.

On the other hand, Sanz said the site is launching a permanent project to cover Honduras and also wants to expand its coverage of Guatemala. "Presence throughout Central America is part of El Faro's DNA," Sanz said.

Additionally, the site also wants to have "a more regular presence in the United States" with the objective of "understanding and serving Central Americans who are in the United States," Sanz said. It's something that "no Central American media has achieved or taken seriously" to date, he added. According to Sanz, "this is a very complex issue, because we are talking about a very heterogeneous population, different generations geographically dispersed, of different status and living conditions, but I think that is the challenge for the Central American media, especially Salvadorans."

For a site that has always focused on "long-form projects," according to Sanz, social networks offer a "first line of reaction and dialogue with readers." The networks "are our platform for breaking news and immediacy, and we reserve the web for more in-depth things," the director explained.

The site is also exploring audiovisual platforms with El Faro TV. In terms of video, the site's first task is "to find our own voice," Sanz explained, adding that at the moment, the battle is being fought with reports and "mini documentary shorts." Óscar Luna, who is in charge of El Faro TV, explains that production is currently focused on two areas: culture –which is a topic rarely discussed on the rest of the site– and inequality (with more extensive reports).

All of El Faro's audiovisual work is distributed through its website, social networks and [YouTube channel](#). According to Sanz, they always seek "the greatest possible impact."



*The Data Art Exhibition (Courtesy)*

And to magnify that impact, the site created El Faro Radio, which has produced an hour-long program broadcast on station FM Punto 105 each Tuesday and Thursday since 2013. The contents of the program are then cut and offered as podcasts. Luna explains that one of the objectives of El Faro Radio is to "spread the contents of El Faro" in a country where internet access is still very low.

### **“The Uncomfortables”**

As mentioned earlier, El Faro became the first media outlet –and not individual journalist– to receive the Recognition of Excellence award from the FNPI.



*The El Faro team accepts the Recognition of Excellence prize from FNPI during the Gabo Festival (David Estrada/FNPI)*

In their [acceptance speech](#), titled “Swimming against the current,” representatives from El Faro referred to the nickname they received from the FNPI: “The Uncomfortables.” They felt at ease with that name: “We recognize ourselves as ‘uncomfortables,’ uncomfortable with power, uncomfortable with criminals, uncomfortable with the corrupt. We are even uncomfortable with ourselves,” they said. And they asked: “But is there another way to create journalism outside of that ‘uncomfortable’ zone?”

They also explained that El Faro is a project that has gone "against the current." For example, regarding the type of journalism they produce, they said, "We find adventure in investigation when, in the middle of a financial crisis, newsrooms of the great papers of the world get rid of specialized teams and spaces. We find adventure in creating strenuous reports and producing long-form articles when common sense calls us to submit to the dictatorship of the ‘click.’”

In that speech, they also wanted to remember the complicated environment in which El Faro's journalistic project was born and developed: "The so-called northern triangle of Central America, composed of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, is today the most violent region in the world. It is a region suffering from poverty, inequality and corruption, extreme corruption." And, it's a place in which the journalism practiced by El Faro is possibly more necessary than ever.

# LESSONS

- Quality journalism should always be the focus, above innovation or chasing clicks.
- Engage your community and make them valuable supporters of your mission.
- Search for your audience not only on the internet, but also offline, through channels such as events, expositions or educational opportunities. Traditional radio broadcasts can also help to build an audience.
- Seek collaboration with international media that may be interested in your journalistic work.
- Create special projects that get the attention of the audience and give personality to your project.



Monitor de Víctimas es un proyecto desarrollado por **Runrun.es** y **Caracas Mi Convive**, que combina periodismo de datos, participación ciudadana y periodismo de investigación. A través de la recolección de información sobre los homicidios que ocurren en Caracas, se busca caracterizar los hechos e identificar patrones que contribuyan con el diseño de políticas públicas orientadas a reducir la violencia.

CON EL APOYO DE

Efecto Cocuyo CRÓNICA UNO El Pitazo EL COOPERANTE EL UNIVERSAL

# Born on Twitter, Runrun.es becomes one of the most important and innovative news sites in Venezuela

By **Ismael Nafría**  
*February 7, 2018*

Each day in Caracas, reporters from different independent digital media sites in Venezuela visit the city's morgues to collect data about the day's victims. Name and surname, circumstances of death and other information about the deceased are recorded in a journalistic database and trends or important stories make their way onto the sites as more in-depth stories.

[Monitor de Víctimas](#) (Victim Monitor) was created in May 2017 and is driven by [Runrun.es](#), one of Venezuela's main independent media sites, and the civil association [Caracas Mi Convive](#). The project also counts on collaboration from other Venezuelan news sites –[Efecto Cocuyo](#), [Crónica Uno](#), [El Pitazo](#) and [El Cooperante](#)– and from newspaper [El Universal](#).

Using a combination of data journalism, citizen participation and investigative journalism, this project provides an essential window into the [most violent city in the world](#). It is an example of the type of innovative approach to journalistic investigation that has come to exemplify the work of Runrun.es, its leadership and reporters. This kind of flexibility and creativity has ensured independent information for a country battling censorship and attacks from the government on a daily basis.

[Caracas is the most violent city in the world](#), according to the annual ranking developed by the Mexican organization Citizen Council for Public Safety and Criminal Justice, which looks at the 50 most violent cities on the planet. Caracas sees 130.35 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants each year. In second place is Acapulco (Mexico), with a rate of 113.24 homicides, and in third place is San Pedro Sula (Honduras), with 112.09. Four of the first ten cities are Venezuelan: in addition to Caracas, Maturín, Guayana and Valencia appear on the list.

In the absence of official figures and victim data, which the government “hides,” according to coordinator of Runrun.es' investigative unit, Lisseth Boon, the team found a solution with the Monitor de Víctimas.



"Since there is no access to official information about how many people die in Caracas, we are building a database of our own," Nelson Eduardo Bocaranda, the site's editor-in-chief and general manager, told the **Knight Center**.

In addition to recording basic data about the deceased, when reporters identify a story to highlight, [they publish an article on the site](#) with the help of civil association Caracas Mi Convive. The organization and its community leaders often reach out to families of the deceased in order to find more complete information.

Additionally, several journalistic works are published every month based on trends identified in the database. For example, cases of families with several deceased members, or the discovery that in six months "there were 530 children left orphaned by deceased fathers in Caracas," said Carmen Riera, coordinator of special projects.

Runrun.es is preparing the second phase of this journalistic project. The goal is for the Monitor de Víctimas to have its own website in April with all data available for any user to consult (currently, the database is restricted to the journalists that work on the project). According to Riera, this is the site's "most relevant" project due to its duration and projections.

This second phase of Monitor de Víctimas will incorporate other innovative elements, such as a print and online manual for writing articles with a focus on human rights and a school that will provide practical workshops for breaking news journalists in several of Venezuela's provinces.

## The origins of Runrun.es

Investigative journalism and the constant search for innovative elements to carry out journalism are some of the main hallmarks of Runrun.es, an independent website that began in 2009 as a Twitter account and blog, as explained by Bocaranda.



*Nelson Bocaranda Sr. (Courtesy)*

"Latino Roots" space about Latinos in the United States and the "Cuba Hoy" section. After returning to Venezuela and finishing his studies in journalism, he worked jobs in audiovisual production and communication.

His father, Nelson Bocaranda, is a veteran and renowned Venezuelan journalist with more than 50 years of professional experience. He published a widely-read column in the press, called "Runrunes" (Rúnrun means "rumor" and "whisper" in Spanish), and he also had radio and television programs. In 2009, in an environment of growing censorship and pressure on the media, "my father's radio program was canceled overnight due to government pressures on the station," Bocaranda explained.

Then, a former boss from AOL Latinoamérica told him about the social network Twitter and encouraged him to open an account for his father so that he could connect directly with his audience from the radio.

"At that time, the Twitter world was very incipient," Bocaranda explained, "but we started with 300 followers, 3,000 followers, 30,000 followers ... and we said: Ok, here is an audience that is eager to be informed. What is the next step? And it was to open a blog."

That Twitter account and blog are the origins of Runrun.es. In the first phase, Nelson Bocaranda, the son, worked on the blog at night, scheduling the news for publication the following day. He included news not only from his father, but from several other colleagues.

"The blog was gaining traction, and when we reached the first 100,000 reads in a month, we decided that we needed a more robust infrastructure," Bocaranda recalled. This is how Runrun.es' first business plan was created, which, like today, had advertising as its main channel of income.

The years 2009 and 2010 were spent developing and launching the Runrun.es blog. The illness of then-Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez prompted another key moment for the project. In November 2012, Nelson Bocaranda, the father, obtained medical information about the serious illness that Chávez suffered from, but was not allowed to publish it in the newspaper where he collaborated. So the Runrun.es blog became the space to also publish this material, which immediately had a huge impact.

That year, the son participated with other Latin American journalists in a course on investigative journalism at the University of California at San Diego. In that course, he finished fine-tuning some aspects of the Runrun.es website, such as the idea of creating an investigative department, which has become one of the main hallmarks of what Runrun.es is today. This investigative team was formally created in May 2014.

## **20 professionals**

The current Runrun.es team is composed of about 20 employees. In 2017 there were some casualties – professionals who decided to leave Venezuela–, so now there are several positions they are trying to replace, including two on the investigative team. "The biggest challenge for any media outlet at this time in Venezuela is to maintain staff," Bocaranda explained. "The trained staff is leaving the country at an accelerated speed."

The essential part of the Runrun.es team is formed by its newsroom and by the journalistic investigations team, which add up to a dozen professionals. Additionally, the site has three people in the sales department, two people for the graphic and audiovisual department and two others who work in the administrative area, in addition to editor-in-chief Nelson Eduardo Bocaranda.

The investigative team, currently led by Boon and composed of professionals with more experience, works at three speeds, according to the editor-in-chief. On the one hand, it conducts "quick, one-week" investigations. On the other, it also works on projects that have a somewhat longer duration, of at least one month. Finally, each year it develops a special project, such as the aforementioned Monitor de Víctimas, which usually includes work with databases, visualizations and related journalistic stories. It is common for these investigations to be carried out in collaboration with other media.

Nelson Eduardo's father, Nelson Bocaranda, continues to publish his widely read column, "[Los Runrunes de Bocaranda](#)," on the site and it is frequently among the ten most read articles each month. He also participates in the weekly editorial meetings and is involved in the investigative team's work. His extensive experience and contacts are invaluable to the team.

## Key journalists

Two of the key journalists involved with Runrun.es currently are Riera and Boon. Both worked at Cadena Capriles, which in its day had one of the largest multimedia newsrooms in Venezuela, made up of some 300 professionals.



*The Runrun.es team (Courtesy)*

Riera was the Graphic Journalism and Audiovisual director at Cadena Capriles, where she was responsible for the areas of design, photography, infographics, video, archiving and web programming. She left when the group was sold in May 2014. A year later, in June 2015, she joined Runrun.es as newsroom coordinator. Last year, Riera requested to partially leave the day-to-day operations of the site and now works part-time as coordinator of special projects, like Monitor de Víctimas. She is also in charge of the current web redesign.

Boon, current head of the investigative unit, worked for ten years as part of the investigative team at Cadena Capriles. Like many other journalists, she ended up abandoning the group after its sale to new owners and subsequent change of editorial line.

The investigative unit at Runrun.es has had three coordinators. The first was [Tamoá Calzadilla](#), who is currently in charge of Special Projects and Investigation at Univision Noticias. He was replaced by [Ronna Rísquez](#), current web editor of investigation and analysis of organized crime at [InSight Crime ES](#). And Boon has held the position since the end of 2017, though she's been part of the team since joining the site.

During her years at Runrun.es, Boon has worked on several journalistic investigations that have been [awarded prizes](#).

One was "a report about the selective contracting of Social Security" at a time "of a terrible crisis of scarcity of almost 90 percent of medical supplies and medications." [The project](#) won an [IPYS Award](#) (Institute Press and Society, for its initials in Spanish) for investigative journalism.

Some reports, as indicated, are carried out in collaboration with other media outlets for reasons of both security and availability of resources. For example, Runrun.es and sites like El Pitazo participated in the investigation of the Panama Papers, a project that in Venezuela was led by [Armando.info](#).

Another work done in collaboration with Armando.info, El Pitazo and Poderopedia was the report "[Cilia Flores' favorite nephew: The man behind the treasury](#)," which offers a portrait of Carlos Erick Malpica Flores, nephew of the lawyer, politician and First Lady of Venezuela, Cilia Flores, who is the wife of Nicolás Maduro. Former Treasury Secretary and treasurer of Petróleos de Venezuela (PDVSA), Malpica Flores was "a character who handled a lot of money and whose face, photo, or name were not known," Boon explained.

## Business model

Runrun.es is a site that, at the moment, has not generated profits. Bocaranda explains that they have managed to balance income and expenses "almost half of the months." When they do not succeed, they count on the contributions of partners and shareholders of the project, who have "the conviction that it is necessary to have open channels to keep citizens informed."

Additionally, the phenomenon of hyperinflation experienced in the country for more than a year means that "any budget is annihilated from one month to the next," the site's editor-in-chief explained.

For certain special investigative projects, Runrun.es has requested aid from international entities. It did so, for example, with a multimedia report on the OLP Operation Liberation and Protection of the People (OLP), a police operation to fight violence that began in July 2015 during Maduro's government. The site worked with journalism platform for the Americas [Connectas](#) on the project. "[OLP: The mask of official terror in Venezuela](#)," denounced how at least 560 people were killed in Venezuela through this operation between July 2015 and June 2017.

Bocaranda points out that the objective with these actions "is to look for additional income for our journalists. Here our commitment is with the employees. We already know that the media are not created to make us millionaires. It is increasingly much more difficult to have a business plan with digital media that generate great profits. That I think is the challenge of the entire media community. But here what we are trying for is for our journalists to at least have decent salaries, that they can live better than the ordinary Venezuelan, and that challenge is already enough because it is increasingly difficult to maintain a quality of life here."

## Innovation in advertising



One of the areas in which Runrun.es constantly tries to innovate is that of advertising, which is the main source of income for the site. Runrun.es works with adservers from different countries to try to get the most out of its international audience, which accounts for 30 percent of traffic. Thus, it has specific agreements for the sale of segmented advertising in Spain, the United States and Colombia, and is preparing an agreement in Panama.

But the most original proposal was the [creation](#) of the [Alianza Rebelde](#) (Rebel Alliance), an agreement between Runrun.es and the sites [TalCual](#) and [El Pitazo](#) for the joint sale of advertising campaigns.



Bocaranda explained the reason for this agreement: "We realized that if we joined media that had a similar editorial line, we could have better results" in the advertising market.

This commercial alliance has not only helped to improve advertising sales but has also fostered the creation of content alliances. According to Bocaranda, in Venezuela "the great media have practically disappeared at a much faster rate than in the rest of the world" due to "the pressures of the government, which have caused them to decrease in size."

"Independent digital media do not have the big budgets of traditional media, and what we have had to do is make some strategic alliances in an ecosystem where normally we would all be competing for the public," Bocaranda explained. Thus, journalistic collaborations are common in which teams are shared "in order to effectively and efficiently cover one-time events, such as elections or protests," he added.

## Launch of a new site



*The Runrun.es newsroom (Courtesy)*

With the aim of attracting those advertisers who prefer not to be linked to information related to the political, economic and social situation that exists in Venezuela, the Runrun.es team is working on the launch of a new website. As its editor-in-chief told the Knight Center, it will be a website with practical information and tips for daily life and will have a brand completely different from that of Runrun.es.

Bocaranda explained that "the political issue is so marked here that brands are often afraid to advertise, because in a regime like the one we are living in, it is not surprising that by advertising in a media like Runrun.es, advertisers later

receive visits from governmental entities." The new site, which could see the light of day within three months, "would be devoted to issues that are not political in order to be able to find sponsorships," Bocaranda added.

This new project has a team of four people: a coordinator and three journalists. The site "is in the final stage of development, with sections that have already been defined" and the team has started to generate content, the editor-in-chief explained.

One of the models that has inspired Bocaranda in the creation of the new site is that of BuzzFeed, in which "the trivial news ends up funding the real news and investigations," he said.

The team is also planning a new launch of the main Runrun.es site in the coming weeks. The project, coordinated by Riera, will simplify the site's structure and utilize data visualization. It also aims to offer a better user experience and to improve loading times.

Riera said the new Runrun.es design will have four major sections: news, Los Runrunes de Nelson, opinion and investigation – they want to give more relevance to these projects, like Monitor de Víctimas and others.



## Audience

The site's traffic is very connected to the political and social news of Venezuela. The last few months have been "very turbulent," Bocaranda said, and this has caused traffic to spike to "between 7 and 10 million unique users per month." However, at other times, in which political activity has less relevance, traffic is lower.

Approximately 70 percent of Runrun.es' traffic comes from Venezuela. The remaining 30 percent is divided between the United States, Colombia and Spain, and also, although to a lesser extent, between countries such as Panama, Chile, Argentina or Mexico, which are also destinations of the Venezuelan wave of migration.

Social networks, and Twitter in particular, are an essential part of Runrun.es' approach and, as a matter of fact, are how Venezuelans generally obtain their news. The editor-in-chief of Runrun.es explains that "the first thing a Venezuelan does when he wakes up is to check Twitter because you never know what may be happening anywhere in the city." The networks also serve "to alert neighbors of things like where there is bread, where there is flour and other basic things," he added.

For Runrun.es, networks such as Twitter and Facebook function as "multipliers of the message," the editor-in-chief said, since they refer to what is published on the page. But in addition, networks have also played an essential role when the site has been the victim of cyber attacks for political reasons. Bocaranda explains that in those cases, Facebook has been used to publish complete information from Runrun.es, and Twitter "to keep our audience informed about the attacks we receive" and to indicate where the news can be read. Runrun.es has not been attacked for a couple of months now, but this risk forces the site to allocate an important budget to server security.

Runrun.es also has a channel on Telegram, which is aimed at some 8,000 people, and "which works like a megaphone" of what the site publishes, Bocaranda said. This channel is especially oriented to the millennial public, so "a language and a sense of humor that is completely different to the rest of our communications in other social networks" is used, said the editor-in-chief, who cites the site [Verne](#), of the Spanish newspaper El País, as a source of inspiration regarding the tone used. "We try to keep it as fun as possible," he said.

## Journalistic commitment

The threats to independent media and freedom of the press in Venezuela are not going to stop the Runrun.es team, says Boon: "It does not stop us from working for even a second. While we can, we will continue, we want to grow, we want to do more work, we want to continue informing, investigating, because here in Venezuela there is a lot of work to be done. I think it's one of the most exciting sites to do journalism."

Riera corroborates that "continuing to fight, so that censorship does not prevail" and exposing "the corruption that exists in this government" is what motivates them to continue reporting. "We can not remain silent, there must be a record of all the atrocities, of all the corruption, and of everything that has happened here and continues to happen," she said.

# LESSONS

- Obstacles in obtaining official information can be overcome with imagination, and original and brave journalistic approaches.
- Projects with a strong identity and long-term dedication help to give a site a strong personality.
- Collaboration with other media can be beneficial for all parties in environments where there is a lot of government pressure. The collaboration may also extend to business areas, especially in less developed markets.
- Promote work by a well-known figure on the team to attract a bigger audience.
- The launch of vertical sites can represent an opportunity to capture additional advertising revenue.
- Get the most out of an international audience with specific advertising agreements for geographical areas.



*The Agência Pública team at Casa Pública. (Courtesy)*

## **Brazil's Agência Pública spreads its investigative journalism around the world with creative financing and distribution solutions**

**By Carolina de Assis**

*February 14, 2018*

Since March 2016, a pink two-story, 300-square-meter house on a tree-lined street in Botafogo, in the southern area of Rio de Janeiro, has been a haven and venue for both Brazilian and foreign journalists and for those interested in journalism and the ongoing changes surrounding the profession.

It is Casa Pública, the first cultural center of journalism in Brazil and a project of Agência Pública, a pioneering independent agency for investigative journalism. The house is also a temporary home for foreign reporters, an incubator for new storytelling ideas and an important space for discussion on the future of journalism in Brazil and Latin America.

Since its creation five years ago, Agência Pública has promoted a revolution not only in its country of origin, but around Latin America. It is one of the main drivers and representatives of a regional scene that brings together digital native media founded and led by journalists that is becoming stronger and more relevant in the region.

Created and directed by journalists Marina Amaral and Natalia Viana, Pública was structured as a non-profit organization dedicated to investigative journalism and has been guided by the public interest and defense of human rights.

## Starting with a leak

The founders and current directors of Agência Pública met at the magazine Caros Amigos, where Amaral was a founder and editor and where Viana began as an intern in 2002, later becoming a reporter.

In 2006, Viana left Caros Amigos to pursue a master's degree in radiojournalism in London, where she became a non-profit investigative journalist through the [Center for Investigative Journalism](#) (CIJ). Upon returning to Brazil, she continued to report for media from various parts of the world, producing and publishing her investigations on human rights issues in Portuguese and English.

Through this international network of investigative journalists, Viana became the Brazil-based organizer of reports for Cablegate, a leak of U.S. diplomatic cables released through WikiLeaks in early 2011. Though the two founders –plus journalist Tatiana Merlino, who ended up leaving early in the project– had previously discussed the idea for Pública, [Cablegate ended up being the site's first big partnership](#) and the impetus for its launch.



*Natalia Viana and Marina Amaral  
(Mary Kang/Knight Center)*

"That's when we founded Brazil's first investigative journalism agency, mirrored a bit after the experience of ICIJ [[The International Consortium of Investigative Journalists](#)], a little from what we learned with WikiLeaks, and also looking at what was happening internationally –[the Bureau of Investigative Journalism](#), the CIJ, [ProPublica](#)," Viana explained to the **Knight Center**.

Amaral had started in journalism in 1984, working in some of Brazil's largest newsrooms as a copywriter, reporter and editor. In 1997, she was part of the founding team at Caros Amigos, where she remained until 2007. She says that her experience at the print magazine, which closed in December 2017, gave her important elements for creating Pública.

"I've learned that to do such a business, you need money to lose. Since we [Viana and I] did not have the money to lose, we thought, 'Okay, let's do what we know how to do: grind. Let's get our work out there and from that work we will get resources,'" Amaral recalled.

To make this project a reality and to sustain it, the directors and their team have experimented with different formats, reporting models and types of funding, while investing in the international distribution of their work and topics that are dear to them, through exchange with foreign journalists.



Additionally, as part of their mission they've incorporated an interesting strategy to disseminate their content, becoming "an agency and not an outlet," as Amaral explained.

Media outlets can republish Pública's stories under a [Creative Commons license](#). As a result, 700 outlets republished Pública's stories in 2017, according to Viana. "From super influential sites like The Guardian [UK], El País [Spain], Folha de S. Paulo and Valor Econômico [Brazil], to the blog Santarém in Pará. It's a very cool, very broad scope."

In the last seven years, the team's diligence and the quality of the content produced by Pública have been recognized nationally and internationally by a few dozen prizes. Viana hinted at the key to the site's success: "Nothing that we do is a result of a crazy idea we put in place overnight," she said. "Marina and I have a rule: if we do not feel it is firm, we wouldn't put it out into the world. Let's think about it a little more. We do everything very calmly, very carefully."

## A house to celebrate journalism

Viana shares an example of this level of care by highlighting one of the agency's main projects: [Casa Pública](#), a cultural center for journalism opened in 2016 in Rio de Janeiro after two years of planning.

Agência Pública was founded in São Paulo, where its headquarters and newsroom remain today. It's where most of the team –currently 19 people– works under Amaral's direct supervision.



*A debate at Casa Pública (Facebook)*

But, it was in the city of Rio de Janeiro that the directors of Pública chose to set up their space to celebrate journalism, as described by Viana, who is responsible for the Casa and for the agency's special projects. This choice was largely due to two major events hosted by the city in recent years: the 2014 Men's World Cup and the 2016 Summer Olympics.

One of the goals of Casa Pública was to expand one of Pública's mentoring programs which it set up at the time of its founding. The Microscholarships for Reporting Contest provides freelance reporters with grants and guidance from the agency's editors. They also wanted to invest in the incubation of other journalism initiatives led by journalists

who don't belong to any economic or traditional media group.

"We felt that it was worth expanding not only this work around incubation, but also the work of collaboration, conversations, events," Viana said. "We thought of a project that would bring that side of collaboration and conversation around the Olympics, with a residence [for journalists]. This was the initial project; Casa Pública would run during the year of the Olympics, it was designed for this. We knew there would be a lot of foreign journalists in Rio, so it was an opportunity to talk to them because Pública had covered human rights violations in relation to the World Cup and the Olympics since 2011."

If at first Casa Pública served to revisit the agency's investigations and connect foreign journalists with the larger context in which the Olympics were taking place, the space soon transcended its initial mission.

In addition to the Olympic Games, Brazil experienced another extraordinary moment in 2016: the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff, then-president of the country. "People had nowhere to talk about it,"



Viana commented. "There have been many conversations here that were very important. For example, we had a conversation that was really cool because it had everything to do with the house: foreign journalists' views on the impeachment." According to Viana, about 400 people lined up that day to enter the space, which comfortably fits 70 people.

"So, on the one hand, people needed a space to talk. On the other hand, students and people interested in journalism lacked a space to talk about the new journalism, a discussion that is not about the 'crisis of journalism,' the 'end of journalism,' bad wages, etc.," the director said.

It's not about ignoring the problems, Viana explained. "But this is a space for us to experiment, reinvigorate and celebrate new journalism," which she defines with a few criteria: digital native organizations, led by journalists whose primary purpose is to do journalism and who act with the goal of reaching long-term stability and sustainability. "These organizations are already changing Brazilian journalism and it will change even more very soon," she believes.

In fact, it was from Casa Pública that the idea for [Festival 3i](#) came about. The event was held in November 2017 with the aim of promoting discussions on journalism that corresponded to three 'i's — innovative, inspiring and independent. In addition to Pública, independent digital media Nexo, Ponte, Agência Lupa, Brio, Nova Escola, Repórter Brasil and [JOTA](#) participated with the support of Google News Lab. Among the guests were representatives of independent outlets from other countries, such as Peru's Ojo Público and Convoca, Argentina's [Chequeado](#) and Tiempo Argentino, Guatemala's [Nómada](#) and [En Malos Pasos](#) of Mexico, among others.

"From the beginning, we wanted to have an independent journalism festival," Viana said. "The other day someone asked me, in the context of 3i, whether journalists in the traditional press can learn from us. Obviously they can, just as we can learn from them. But we learn from them all the time, because at every conference, at every conversation in a university, you listen to the perspectives of the traditional press, the traditional way of producing news. Cool, I do not think it has to go away, but I think there's a lot going on that needs to be heard, and Casa also brings that."



*The front of Casa Pública (Courtesy)*

## **Journalistic residency**

Casa Pública hosts more than conversations: journalists can also spend time on site as part of Pública's residency program and LABs — its Journalistic Innovation Laboratories. The property holds up to eight people in two collective rooms on the second floor.

The residency program welcomes foreign journalists who can stay at the house for free for up to 15 days. During this period, they receive support from the Pública team in the production of reports on human rights issues in Brazil. Applications are submitted [through Pública's website](#).

The first round of residencies took place in 2016 at the time of Casa Pública's opening and focused on covering human rights violations in the context of the Olympic Games. At that time, Pública offered a scholarship for journalists who stayed in the house and investigations were published in print and digital outlets from [Chile](#), [Ecuador](#), [Kenya](#), the [United States](#) and [Italy](#), among others.

"From Agência Pública's point of view, it is cool because it not only strengthens exchange, relationships, contacts between journalists, but also increases the visibility of human rights issues in Brazil," Viana said. "Covering this topic in Brazil is a rather inglorious task and it is always helpful when something is published abroad."

German journalist Caren Miesenberger was one of the two residents of the house this January. Based in Hamburg, she was selected for the program along with her story on the imprisonment of women in Brazil, to be published in feminist German magazine [Missy Magazine](#).

"I learned about Pública in 2014 when I lived in Brazil for a year," Miesenberger said. "I've followed its work ever since. I believe a lot in alternative, independent media, and what I admire most about Pública is the innovation aspect. This house is something very unique, I had never seen anything like it."

She had already worked as a correspondent in Brazil investigating stories that were published in Germany, and she felt a difference between the two experiences. "A support network was missing. I would stay at my house, in front of the computer, writing the stories. There was no exchange. It's the first time I've been in a place with a lot of journalists, and I feel very supported for my work, with exchanging ideas and suggestions for contacts."

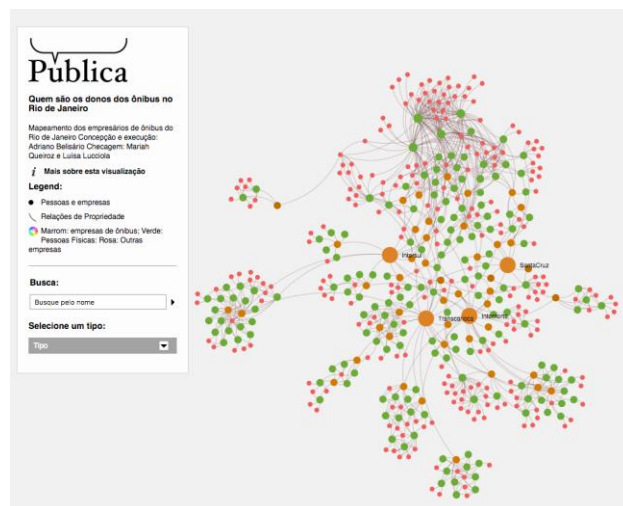
Miesenberger highlights the formation of ties between journalists from several countries as one of the most important points of the residency program. "There should be a house like this in all parts of the world so that we can form a network independent of the mainstream media and of interests other than good journalism," she said.

## Innovation labs

Like the residency program, the Journalistic Innovation Laboratories (LABs) were conceived as part of the Casa Pública project and involve participants being immersed in the same space – the professionals carrying out the projects who are from other cities stay and work in the house. In addition to the unique process for producing reports, the agency experiments with different formats and new technologies for its investigations in the LABs.

By January 2018, the results from five LABs had been published: "[100](#)", which tells one hundred stories of one hundred families forcibly removed due to the Olympics; "[Vigilância](#)", about how the security apparatus for the World Cup and the Olympics is used for repression and criminalization of demonstrations; "[Museu do Ontem](#)" (Museum of Yesterday), an application that traces the urban transformation of Rio de Janeiro's port region, from the time of colonization to the Olympic Games; "[Catraca](#)" (Turnstile), on the ownership of bus companies in Rio de Janeiro; and "[Coleção Particular](#)" (Private Collection), on the illegal privatization of the coast and other public spaces in Brazil.

Viana, coordinator of LABs, has been responsible for inviting journalists and other professionals – designers, artists– who participate in the laboratories. Participating members have been members of the Pública team as well as freelancers who are chosen by Viana because of their experience with each theme, or for her trust in their contributions.



*The LAB about bus companies in Rio used data visualization. (Screenshot)*

This was the case with Colombian Olga Lucía Lozano. A founder of digital independent site [La Silla Vacía](#), Lozano served as creative editor for the first two LABs, which were launched in July 2016 and January 2017.

"I got to the first meeting with the local team and Natalia Viana said 'look, we want to tell 100 stories of 100 families that have been removed,'" Lozano recalled. The editor was responsible for finding solutions for this mission. "I started with how to gather one hundred voices and tell one hundred stories without losing the characteristic and individual tone of each one of them, but which can also really create an emotional bond with those who visit [the stories]."

Experimentation with the format was designed to facilitate the creation of this emotional bond, the editor said. "What I did was propose to create a small city in which you could find all the elements that are part of the 100, but to use them to tell the real stories: the door of a favela, of a person, a family," she explained. The choice for audiovisual presentation, with interviews in video and audio and maps of the places where people were removed and where they were relocated, "allows us to see that people of flesh and blood" are living those situations, Lozano believes.

For Viana, the "[Museu do Ontem](#)" (the Museum of Yesterday), launched in June 2017, is the highlight of the LABs held so far. "Yesterday's Museum generated a product that is very new. The previous LABs, Vigilância and 100, are very innovative interactive sites, but they are things that already existed before. The Museum of Yesterday is something else," Viana said.



*The application Museu do ontem uses geolocation to tell stories about Rio's port. (Screenshot)*

The application, created in collaboration with Dutch-Iranian developer Babak Fakhmzadeh, [combines geolocation and investigative journalism](#) to talk about the past and present of Rio de Janeiro's port area. As users move through the area, new stories specific to their location are offered on their phones. From the desire to create an application that deals with the urban changes that took place in the city around the Olympics, the Pública team created a tool that tells stories of the occupation of the area – revamped as Porto Maravilha – over three centuries. It walks users from the colonial era of Brazil, when it was the [main entry point of Africans enslaved by Europeans in the Americas](#), to the recent public works in the area investigated by Agência Pública, including [the disappearance of steel beams from the demolition of the Perimetral viaduct](#).



The last LAB, “Coleção Particular” (Private Collection), was published in December 2017, and there are two more LABs being produced. These will be published in the first half of 2018 and will close the first cycle of specials, provided for in the financing of Casa Pública. One will have three 360-degree mini-documentaries, Viana said. "We decided to explore this format, which is controversial. It was crazy, everyone was talking, and today people are more skeptical, but we thought it was worth it. LAB is to explore, and this is where we will be able to explore this format."

Viana said that, at the end of the publication of the seven LABs planned as part of the original project, the idea is to evaluate what types of formats and technologies worked and to think about the future of the initiative. According to Viana, it is necessary to think about the real cost of the LABs, since the maintenance of platforms and tools –such as the Museum of Yesterday application or the collaborative map of the Private Collection special –was not accounted for in the original project. "Technology is a tricky business. What you create, you need to maintain. The cost of maintaining an application is high. Higher than maintaining a website," she said.

## Financing innovation

The LABs and the residency program for foreign journalists are part of Casa Pública, which has its own funding because it is a project of Agência Pública. To launch the house in 2016, "we knocked on people's doors, we received several no's and some yes's," Viana recalled. The yes's came from organizations such as the Ford Foundation, Porticus, the Oak Foundation and Open Society Foundations, which providing funding for two years. For the next year, Ford, Oak and Open Society maintained their support.



*Reportagem Pública, a crowdfunding Project from A Pública raised almost US \$26,500 in 2017. (Screenshot)*

"It's a project, it has a deadline," Viana said, adding that Pública is evaluating "if it's worth it for the house to be permanent –we think it's super important, we think it still has a lot more potential, but it's expensive for the house itself, in Rio de Janeiro. We need to seek more funding for this project specifically."

On the [Transparency](#) page on its website, Pública explains the sources and destinations of its revenue in 2017. The organization's total revenue last year was R \$2,767,121 (about US \$840,000), raised from institutional funding, sponsorship and crowdfunding. In addition to Ford, Oak and Open Society Foundations, the main funders are the Climate and Land Use Alliance and the Betty and Jacob Lafer Institute.

"At this point, what's important for us is that we consolidate sources of funding for longer periods of time," director Amaral told the Knight Center at Pública's office in São Paulo.

"Our priority is to make Pública a resilient organization that can have an eternal life, and that is not subject to this fragility of media outlets and organizations that live from foundations," Amaral said. According to her, Pública follows the same model it had when it was founded: a non-profit organization, with funding from foundations or the public and without ads.

"Eternal sustainability does not exist," according to Viana. Each year is a continuous search for new revenue.

And so Pública has been innovating in that sense, as well. Like Casa Pública, crowdfunding campaign Reportagem Pública (Public Report) and the Microscholarships for Reporting Contest are initiatives that diversify sources of revenue to finance the agency's work.

Public Report is a collective funding campaign for reporting that Pública has carried out for three years: 2013, 2015 and 2016. The agency raised R\$45,000 (about US \$14,000) in the first, while the last campaign raised R\$85,000 (about US \$26,000), R\$5,000 more than Pública's goal.

The model innovates by giving voice and vote to each person who donates to the reports. They help decide the stories that will be produced and have direct contact with reporters and editors about the outcome.

"Every month we send everyone who provided an email three suggestions from three different reporters and ask them to vote," Viana explained. "The winning story gets \$7,000 and is produced, the other two are not carried out."

In addition to the voting, contributors are invited to join a closed Facebook group where they can talk to the Pública staff, including journalists and editors who are producing the stories.

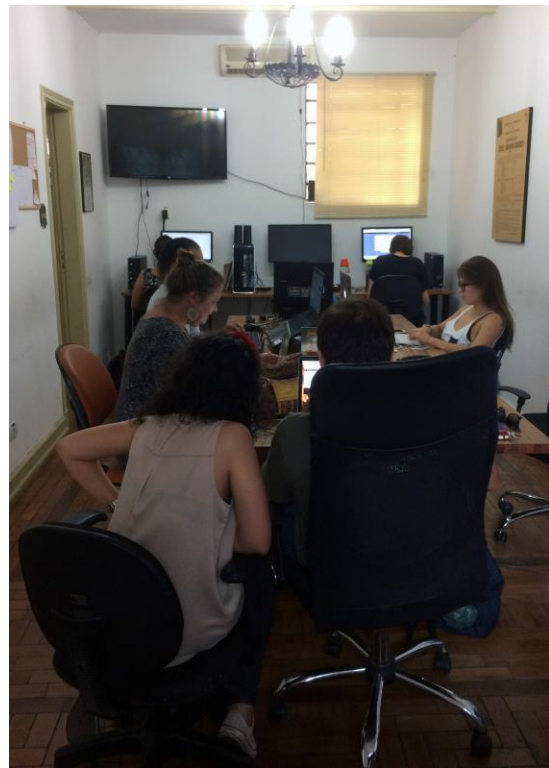
The Microscholarships for Reporting Competition calls for the participation of independent journalists who want to produce stories about the themes proposed in each edition. The reporters whose stories are selected by Pública receive R\$7,000 (about US \$2,100) and mentorship from the agency's editors for two months.

The first two editions did not have a specific theme, Viana recalled. "From there we began to realize that there was a great demand from NGOs that were looking for Pública and saying 'why don't you do stories about Belo Monte?' for example. We always respond that our financing policy is as follows: we do not do commissioned work. Pública only works on its own projects. Otherwise you're going to trade the pressure of the advertiser for the pressure of the financier, and we do not want that."

The themed minisolarships were therefore a way of combining the need for funding for the agency's investigative journalism and the demand from organizations for investigation of certain topics. And very importantly, it ensures Pública's editorial independence.

Among the microscholarship competitions that have already been held are ones on [energy](#), sponsored by Greenpeace; [children and water](#), sponsored by the Alana Institute; and [marijuana](#), sponsored by the Center for Security and Citizenship Studies (Cesec). The next, in partnership with Conectas Human Rights, will be about police violence, Viana said.

"The NGO gives us the theme, but they are broad themes," Viana said. "Pública puts out the call for projects and receives the story proposals." The site pre-selects some stories and then decides on the final selection along with the financier.



*The Pública team at the newsroom in São Paulo. (Knight Center)*



And this is the limit of the financier's influence, she said. "Our partners rely on our work and do not see the material before it is published." Pública then carries out the project coordination and editing.

"We have to think of ways to have different financing," Viana said. "A lot of people are doing events, and crowdfunding is also super important. There are those who have subscribers, paywall, products –El Faro, for example, makes t-shirts. It is very important to always be trying to vary the financing model. But that's it: eternal sustainability does not exist."

## **The future of Pública**

In October, the Brazilian electorate will go to the polls to vote for a new president, governors and federal and state congress members in an ultrapolarized political environment –fertile ground for the dissemination of so-called "fake news." Pública's greatest asset for this period is the expansion of its fact-checking project [Truco](#). The idea is to check candidates' speeches daily in at least eight Brazilian states.

For this, Pública's staff in São Paulo will teach the agency's fact-checking methodology to independent journalists spread throughout the country. The operation was already tested during the 2016 municipal elections in five capitals and will be expanded in 2018, strengthening Pública's performance at this newsworthy time faster than the traditional model of investigative journalism allows.

"I consider fact-checking to be a genre of investigative journalism," Viana said. "It's like a short, concise little model. It's super interesting because they found a way to quickly do investigative journalism without it having to be a long story."

The agency has also strengthened its production of [video reports](#), which, according to Amaral, have a significant international reach. Some of the agency's mini-documentaries have already been shown at film festivals and on the Brazilian channel [Futura](#). But one of the objectives is to consolidate Pública's presence on TV –something considered with the genesis of the special [Amazônia Resiste](#), which features video reports, Amaral said.

"Joining technology and shoe-leather reporting is very typical of Pública," Amaral commented. "When I went to the [ISOJ](#) [International Symposium on Online Journalism] in Austin, one of the conclusions of the congress was that good old investigative journalism is still the most important thing we have. We only have new tools to use."

# LESSONS

- Strengthen connections with national and foreign journalists who are interested in the focus of your media coverage. They will be not only partners but also important promoters of your work.
- Plan and execute your projects with care and dedication and do not hurry to launch them. Put them in the world when you're sure they're ready and match the standard of quality you want your media to be recognized for.
- There is no eternal sustainability. Always seek to diversify sources of income and create revenue models that adapt and work for your environment.
- Technology must serve your environment, not vice versa. Make use of the new tools in ways that empower, and not limit, the impact and reach of your work.
- Provide space for bigger conversations with the journalistic community about the future of the profession.
- Quality investigative journalism should be the primary focus of your work.



*"The Habit of Silence" is the first part of an investigative work from artista Germán Andino. (El País)*

## Graphic artists from Latin America use comic journalism to communicate society's problems

By César López Linares  
February 21, 2018

Germán Andino was in his teens when the gang war in Honduras began at the end of the 90s. He experienced the increase in violence first-hand in his own neighborhood in Tegucigalpa and knew members of these criminal groups closely.

His mastery of the streets and gangs allowed him to work as a guide for foreign journalists interested in telling what was happening in his country. But over time, he felt the need to tell stories about those conflicts from his own point of view. He had no journalistic training, so he took refuge in what has been his passion since childhood: drawing.

Andino, who was a tattoo artist and studied graphic art and later computer systems engineering, took his first steps in journalism by illustrating reports from correspondents such as [Antonio Pampliega](#) and [Alberto Arce, both from Spain](#).

In 2012, he began an investigation that would become "[El Hábito de la Mordaza](#)" (The Habit of Silence), his first report in comic format that would take four years to produce. That project, which earned him the [2017 Gabo Award in the Innovation category](#), was published by Spanish newspaper El País.

"'The Habit of Silence' comes from my own experience in Tegucigalpa and of having grown up more or less at the time the gangs developed in the capital of Honduras and in San Pedro Sula," Andino told the **Knight Center**. "One day I decided to tell my own story, because it was quite clear that the work that was done at a journalistic level from the outside consisted of arriving, staying a week, and with what you had, going out and telling the story that you could. Then I decided to invest my own time in this."

Andino is one of several graphic artists from Latin America who have approached journalism from a need to tell stories about the reality of their countries and communities, on topics that do not normally fall into the coverage of traditional newspapers. This is how comics have become part of the journalistic toolkit on a growing scale.

"There is a vision that cartoonists have of approaching journalism from the self-narrative, of them telling their experience about an event," Susana Escobar, specialist in visual communication, visual narratives and comics and journalism at the Autonomous University of Chiapas, Mexico, told the **Knight Center**. "In Latin American countries, it is usually the cartoonists who ventured into journalism. They dabble as they can. Many of them have no [journalistic] training."



*Germán Andino drew portraits of his sources to gain trust.  
(Steffen Stubager)*

Although comic journalism has been practiced for several years in the United States and Europe –[where there are even media outlets dedicated entirely to the format](#)– in Latin America it began to strengthen at the beginning of this decade due to the need to tell stories that they are complicated to deal with in traditional formats, either because of the difficulty of the investigation or because they deal with very local issues.

For Andino, the main innovation of "The Habit of Silence," which tells the story of Isaac, a young man who suffered violence as a child and found refuge in the gangs, is to present a longform investigation in comic format, on a digital platform with multimedia elements.

"It's the closest thing to a longform *crónica*," Andino said. "It's a huge drawing, horizontal. With this format, what I did was control the flow of the story. I had to draw some very long things to be able to follow that linear sense of the story, which also comes in handy because it works like that, like a timeline."

Andino turned to drawing from the start of his investigation. Through portraits, he managed to get close to gang members and gain their trust so they would tell him about their lives in the streets. He realized that drawings are a good replacement for photographs when carrying a camera is dangerous.

"It is not the same to take a photograph of a gang member as to sit with them for an hour to draw a picture," Andino explained. "That allows you to establish a totally different link from that of a normal journalist who takes notes or photographs. [The gang members] almost ask you to 'make me a portrait.' I say 'good, but while I'm doing it we're going to talk a little'. And they say 'yes, yes cool.' And I do not know, the thing flows better."

Andino does not consider himself a journalist, but said that the "people who I talk to always know that they will end up being drawn or part of a story."

Brazilian artist Alexandre De Maio also benefited from working without a large camera or recorder in hand. In 2013, he collaborated with Agência Pública reporter Andrea Dip to publish "[Meninas em Jogo](#)" (Girls in Play), a comic investigation on child trafficking networks in Fortaleza, Brazil, within the framework of that year's Confederations Cup.

"When possible, I take reference photographs to help with the realism," De Maio said in an interview with the **Knight Center**. "But when there is danger, I see, I memorize and then I draw. When I wrote about child exploitation, I went to several places, at night, very dangerous. In Fortaleza I could not photograph, nor write anything down."



The graphic artist said that most of the time, he identifies himself as a journalist. But in cases in which he is reporting and people do not know, he does not identify them. When he works on issues like child sexual exploitation, he changes physical characteristics.

De Maio and Dip were the winners of the Tim Lopes award for "Meninas en Jogo." The work required three months of investigation plus another two for the drawing process.

"In Brazil, no one had ever done such a big report in this format," De Maio said.

"It was published online, but the print version of it would be 80 pages long. I think the great innovation was to show that the format of comics works to tell this kind of story. A serious theme, with care, that leaves nothing to be desired in comparison with great longform articles."

Like Andino, De Maio's entry into journalism was through his desire to tell stories about his community. He began making illustrations for a magazine specializing in rap, in which he later combined comics with writing.

"In 1999, I thought about making a comic about real things happening on my street. And I looked for a publisher to release this comic," De Maio said. "I did not have education in journalism. I practiced journalism, I received my professional certification. I wrote about almost every subject. I spent time just writing. And I went back to drawing in 2006."

De Maio realized that comics had enormous advantages for journalism, especially because they appeal to the strength of the image.

"Comics are incredible for journalism as a language" De Maio said. "It brings the impact of the image, the strength of the image. You add two very strong languages. The written language with the visual. Investigative journalism is highly valued in comics."

An extensive issue like sexual exploitation or gang violence has limited possibilities to run in daily publications beyond breaking news articles or notes that report the actions of the authorities. The comic is an option for in-depth investigation to find a place in the mass media.



"The comic is a genre that adapts to an infinite number of formats, and that has a great advantage," Susana Escobar said. "With the comic, we can deal with issues that daily newspaper practice does not take into account due to different circumstances: war, human rights, enforced disappearance, environmental issues, which are the topics that Latin American authors are dealing with."

To reinforce the self-narrative character of their work, Andino and De Maio included themselves in their stories, in order to humanize conflicts and gain the empathy of the audience.



The report "Meninas em Jogo" showed reporter Andrea Dip and illustrator Alexandre De Maio as characters in the comic. (Screenshot).

The first vignettes of "Girls in Play" show Agência Pública reporter Andrea Dip organizing an investigation on child exploitation in Fortaleza, and throughout the comic you can see how Dip and De Maio become involved in the conflict.

Andino appears several times in "The Habit of Silence," and sometimes he himself provides commentary and thoughts.

"It does not help me to separate myself from the story, pretending that it does not affect its objectivity," Andino said. "I'm not commenting and giving my opinion all the time, I do it very specifically and I try to make it clear when I'm making a comment or something that is not hard data, that it is my opinion. I think you have to 'get wet' and get into the story, and do not pretend to be objective because it's impossible."



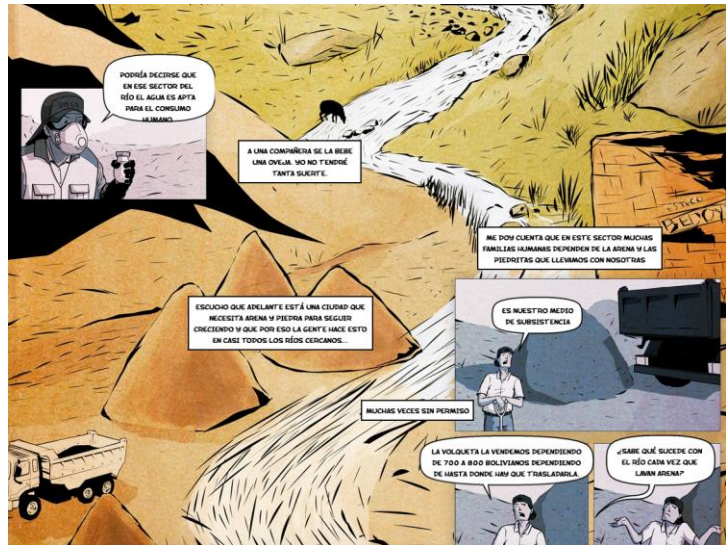
Andino decided to appear in his own comic to tell the story from a more personal point of view. (El País)

Changing the faces of their sources in the drawing and not being totally faithful to reality when recreating a place are other licenses taken by the authors of comic journalism. This has led to questions about whether these kinds of stories are really journalism.

"I think that the genre demands other forms and that this is not without an ethical component to inform," Escobar said. "What is being said there is not a lie; they are just other ways of telling a story. The licenses have value and also enrich the work and the look. I believe that the public automatically enters that language and knows that it is reading another type of journalism, another kind of information, it doesn't demand that they're 100 percent realistic."

Despite the creative licenses, both "Meninas em Jogo" and "The Habit of Silence" incorporate journalistic methods like field research, verification of information and the incorporation of hard data, among others, just like other important representatives of the genre in Latin America, like [Jesús Cossío](#), from Peru, and [Augusto Mora](#), from Mexico.

"I think it's journalism because the new journalism is exploring languages that get out of the boxes imposed by the journalistic genres," Escobar said. "They are journalists trying to do journalism from the subjective perspective. They realized that the public needed to read other things, they needed to learn about things in a different way, in a reflective and experiential way."



*In "Choqueyapu, un Río Enfermo que nos Alimenta", the river is a character that narrates the longform comic story. (Connectas)*

There are also traditional journalists who decide to experiment with the format of comics, and for that they turn to illustrators to turn their reports into cartoons. Reporter Carla Hannover, of Bolivian newspaper [Página Siete](#), turned to comics for the digital version of her report "[Choqueyapu, un Río Enfermo que nos Alimenta](#)" (Choqueyapu, a diseased river that feeds us), an extensive investigation about the contamination of the main waterway in La Paz. Her goal was to make her text –more than 30 pages in its print version– friendly and understandable on the internet.

"When you prioritize paper, you do not think much about digital," Hannover told the **Knight Center**.

For that reason, Hannover said she didn't think about getting multimedia material during the reporting process. Video and audio elements she captured as part of the report did not have high enough quality to post digitally. For that reason, a multimedia comic was a better solution.

Hannover did the work as part of her participation in an investigative journalism course with the transnational journalism organization [Connectas](#) in 2017. She looked for the illustrator Joaquín Cuevas of Bolivia, who designed a comic book in the shape of the letter U, which is the same shape of the Choqueyapu River in La Paz.

The journalist also gave the comic a self-narrative touch, and although she does not appear in the story, it is the river that narrates the report in the first person, something that would have been unthinkable in the original version.

"The text was very repetitive," Hannover said. "Then I took a chance and said 'let's take a license. Let's talk to the river.' Nothing he's going to talk about is invented, but we treat him like a character, because the river is an icon of the city and with it you can create a character."

To give validity to the narration of the Choqueyapu River, the comic is accompanied by infographics, tables and audio that appear when clicking on certain responsive points.

"Choqueyapu, a sick river that feeds us" is an example of how comics for journalistic purposes stimulate collaborative and multidisciplinary work. In several cases, the artists rely on a reporter to carry out their research, and vice versa, thus forming a pair like the duo of reporter and photographer. Additionally, when the comic is presented on a digital platform, a programmer is added to the team.

"Usually, famous illustrators like [\(Maltese-American\) Joe Sacco](#) almost always do it alone. They report, immerse themselves, interview and document," said Cecibel Romero, Connectas editor who oversaw the Hannover project. "In this case there was a division of tasks. The team members were never in the same place, it was all done long-distance. It was a work of great collaboration and with a combination of talents from different disciplines put at the service of one project. "

The high costs and the long production time required for a comic strip prevent news organizations in Latin America from including this type of work in their daily publications, which is why comic journalism has been explored mostly independently.



*In March, Alexandre De Maio released his first nonfiction comic book, based on interviews he carried out with a credit card cloner. (Courtesy of Alexandre De Maio)*

However, the creators of comic journalism believe that the traditional Latin American media are beginning to realize that it is an area they should explore.

"The possibilities in Latin America are endless," Andino said. "Especially because there is not much being done. There is a lot of room; it is a medium that is in diapers in Latin America in non-fiction themes. "

After the success of the works of Alexandre De Maio in Brazil, large traditional media such as Estadão have invited him to collaborate, and he has given journalism classes in comics to students who, under his mentorship, have managed to get some media outlets to publish their work.

"The outlets are understanding how to use comic journalism in Brazil," De Maio said. "There are at least three or four people who can publish this kind of comic journalism in magazines, online. I myself did more than 42 stories for different magazines, online publications after the Tim Lopes prize. As I am one of the first to do this in Brazil, I managed to do a lot and saw other people doing this kind of work as well."

The internet and social networks are key to the future of comic journalism in Latin America, since they facilitate the distribution of reports in this format, which are difficult to publish on paper because of their size and characteristics.

"The internet reaches a lot more people," De Maio said. "'Girls in Play' had thousands of hits in Brazil and more than 250,000 hits through [Buzzfeed in the United States](#). A magazine would hardly give that kind of visibility. The internet is much easier and it's free as well."

The main contribution of the authors of comic journalism in Latin America is the way to approach issues and sensitive social conflicts from a human perspective, according to Escobar.

"That is the contribution of Latin American journalists: turning to see the issues that hurt the journalist himself," she said. "Journalism in comics humanizes those situations, that conflict has a face, people are affected, there are victims."

# LESSONS

- For sensitive topics that are complicated to deal with in traditional media, comics give an opportunity to offer information in a way that is more attractive and easily consumed by audiences.
- Journalists wishing to experiment with comics must coordinate with the illustrator and programmer (in the case of web production) in order to be clear from the beginning about what is possible in creating a comic journalism report.
- Social networks are a good option for newspapers to explore comics. They can be used for reporting that reports -which for questions of space and content could not be included in print editions- in a . This way, a comic is more easily shared and views are multiplied.
- Comics are a good alternative to taking photos in dangerous places, and when you don't have a photographer to provide images for a story.
- For comic artists who want to do journalism in this format, it is more convenient to work on one project at a time and to do so independently. The media in general are not willing to pay someone for a product that involves investigating and drawing for several months.
- The informative article, the cultural or sports reviews and the background interview are genres that have good potential to be dealt with in comics in traditional media. Their production time is shorter and they are equally attractive to the audience.





*María Paulina Baena presents the video column “La Pulla” from behind the newspaper editor’s desk. (Twitter).*

# Satirical video column brings new life and audience to traditional Colombian newspaper’s opinion section

**By Dylan Baddour**

*February 28, 2018*

Few journalists are better known among Bogotá youth than 27-year-old María Paulina Baena. Once a week she appears on camera, variably napping on her desk, waving her arms and always overflowing with furor as she bluntly calls out the faults of her country and its leaders.

She hosts *La Pulla*, a five-to-eight-minute “video column” put out by Colombia’s oldest newspaper, *El Espectador*. At a time when traditional media are struggling to bring a new generation into their readership, *La Pulla* has proven a viral success among a young audience, due in large part to Baena’s eccentric, searing style.

“It’s like putting all my energy into a character, putting all my rage,” she told the **Knight Center**. “It’s like a fictional character, but a journalist who reports true facts.”

Produced by a team of three journalists and filmed in the editor’s office with a camera set atop a stack of books, the episodes regularly exceed 1 million views [on Facebook](#) and also pull in high numbers on YouTube, sporting provocative titles like, “[ten steps to be assassinated in Colombia](#),” “[Here’s how multinationals evade taxes](#),” and “[what your domestic employee would like to tell you](#).”

Seldom have other traditional media been able to pull of a production as hip as La Pulla. Even for El Espectador, this home run came after a decade of turbulent experimentation, which saw the birth and death of stories for children, countless blogs and numerous video projects at the newspaper.

Nelson Padilla, Sunday editor at El Espectador, said the recipe for success involves a reorganization of the traditional newsroom hierarchy that had suited veterans calling the shots behind closed doors while young grunts clacked quietly away at their keyboards. Now, the folks on top look to those at the bottom for answers.

“The new ideas come from new generations,” said Padilla, who started his first job at El Espectador in 1991. “We’ve had to give the interns more responsibility.”

Baena was one of those interns. She started at El Espectador in 2014 while studying political science and communication at a Bogotá university. Later she was hired to cover environmental issues. Then one day, she got an email announcing the paper would hold auditions for a new video segment.



The idea had already been kicked around the newsroom for a few months, honed by a group of young friends from different departments who wanted to see the newspaper produce the type of media that they liked to consume: American late night talk shows and trendy YouTubers.

“The cool thing is that La Pulla came about in an atypical way,” said Daniel Salgar Antolinez, 31, then-international reporter at El Espectador and a founding member of the La Pulla team. “It didn’t come as a strategy from above, but rather from below, from the journalists.”

Management had been looking for a way to interest younger readers in the opinion section. Another video project had been tried—a political humor series—but it required actors, scripts, fancy cameras and a set. Too complex, that project died in six months. So the journalists had a simpler idea.

“We wanted to be like YouTubers, but also with good journalism,” said Salgar, now the Spanish-language editor for the Turkish news agency Anadolu.

Approved for launch, the yet unnamed video series needed a host. When the email for auditions went out, Baena signed up.

She read the sample script, a piece about a recent scandal involving sexual abuse and police officers, then she memorized it. She sat in front of her computer practicing, searching for a voice that could speak for her generation—young people plugged in to the global community and baffled by their country’s history of corruption, civil war, drug violence and assassinations.

She thought of the style of Jaime Garzón, a Colombian journalist and peace activist famous for his quick-witted satire, who was [murdered by political enemies in the streets of Bogotá in 1999](#). Baena felt a sense of rage, boiled over frustration with the absurdity of such dysfunction.

“For me it was important to show that emotion,” she said. “Rabid, indignant, with a very strong tone, we are getting this from the young people.”

“Through laughter, we could show how absurd this country is,” she said.

Soon her character emerged: a sincere and deeply frustrated woman who delivers journalistic reports with flailing arms and a tone of disbelief; a woman who speaks in an abrasive way that women are not known to speak in Colombian media; a newscaster who breaks the doll-faced standard, with frizzy hair and a man’s coat and tie.

Baena aced the audition. A five-member team wrote the script for the first episode of the series then named La Pulla, or “the taunt.” The video launched in April 2016 and went viral. The second video had even more views. The team knew they had a hit.

Later they sought to monetize La Pulla, but didn’t want to put ads or product plugs into the show. They won grant funding from Instinto de Vida, a project supported by Open Society Foundations, to produce seven episodes on lethal violence in Latin America. German political foundation Freidrich-Ebert-Stiftung financed episodes on housekeepers, multinational corporations, a Bogotá slum and cyberactivism. Sponsored episodes end with a sentence on screen identifying the funder.



*A recent episode of La Pulla about "castrochavismo" has been viewed 1.7 million times on Facebook. (Twitter)*

“La Pulla discovered that, yes, you can do journalism like this without putting ads everywhere,” said Salgar. “That discovery was very important.”

Now various foundations pledge funds for La Pulla to address their own target issues, and the program pays the salaries of its team, who also earn money giving public talks.

As a result, La Pulla will remain free, even as [El Espectador announced earlier this month that its website will go behind a paywall](#) starting in March. It couldn’t be monetized with a paywall anyway, the journalists said, as few viewers find it on the homepage, but rather on Facebook or YouTube.

Furthermore, prospects for funding are looking up at La Pulla. Just last week, the show launched one of its most successful episodes – [a criticism of fear mongering over “castrochavismo”](#)– which has racked up 1.7 million views and 115,000 shares on Facebook since it was published on Feb. 22, and ended with an announcement of a year-long series funded by Open Society Foundations that will address elections in Latin America, migration, Colombian politics and human rights in the continent.

The peace process in Colombia has provided La Pulla one of its best-performing pieces: an episode from November 2017 about the possibility of FARC leader Rodrigo Londoño, known as Timochenko, becoming president of the country. Guest hosted by team member and coordinator of opinion at El Espectador, Juan Carlos Rincón Escalante, [the episode received 5 million views on Facebook](#).

In general, episodes about major trending news themes score the most views for La Pulla, which won a [Simón Bolívar National Journalism Award in 2016](#) for its video [“Allow homosexuals to adopt.”](#)

Other top performing episodes include: [commentary on Colombia’s peace process](#) with a guest appearance by a popular YouTuber, [criticism of Colombia’s rejection](#) of the peace accords by popular vote in 2016 and an episode about a [takeover by police and soldiers](#) of a neighborhood in Bogotá known as the Bronx that had “its own government,” as explained by La Pulla.

Now the paper is launching other similarly inspired video columns, including a feminist talk program and a social media news cast.

“It helps the reputation of El Espectador,” said Padilla, the Sunday editor. “It shows us as a modern media, inclusive and liberal.”

## LESSONS

- Look to your young reporters and interns for ideas on how to attract millennial readers who want to consume news differently.
- Don’t be afraid to be silly with a younger audience, but use humor to frame serious subjects with legitimate reporting.
- Study media organizations that get popular traction. Try and adapt the style to journalism.
- Encourage collaboration that transcends the traditional sections of a newsroom.
- Explore options for funding outside the traditional advertising model.





*Part of la diaria's newsroom (Courtesy)*

# Six ways that Uruguay's la diaria is innovating how newspapers operate and connect with the community

**By Ismael Nafría**

*March 14, 2018*

Uruguayan newspaper [la diaria](#), born in 2006, is an atypical case in the Latin American media environment. Its experience offers a sum of innovative elements in areas such as journalistic formula, business model and the media-audience relationship, among others.

With initiatives, such as its management by a worker's cooperative, the launch of paid vertical channels, its bet on digital subscriptions or its innovation laboratory known as la diaria LAB, this newspaper from Uruguay has managed to gain a foothold in the innovative Latin American media landscape.

Additionally, la diaria was recently one of [five international media organizations selected](#) by [The Membership Puzzle](#) initiative, founded by the Studio 20 program at New York University and the Dutch media [De Correspondent](#) to study and analyze journalistic models supported in a special way by users through subscriptions or memberships.

## Birth of la diaria

La diaria, which is based in the Uruguayan capital of Montevideo, started publishing in print from Monday to Friday in 2006. The idea of creating this new newspaper emerged from a group of university students, including Damián Osta, current general manager of the newspaper.

"We had nothing to read," Osta explained to the **Knight Center**. "We were a group of citizens and critical readers who did not agree with the press offerings in Uruguay at the time." So they decided to try to create their own newspaper.

The preliminary debates and preparation began in 2004, a couple of years before the newspaper officially launched. "There were many conversations in which we met with people who felt the same as us," Osta said. The first big challenge was to "bring together a team of journalists who matched with the newspaper we wanted," with the additional difficulty of "having zero business management experience and no capital."

Thus, the team began to raise funds among future readers to finance the newspaper. But as Osta explains, at that time there was not a favorable culture in Uruguay for financing startups, so the initial amount collected was only \$40,000. Among others, journalist and writer Mario Benedetti, who died in 2009, contributed funds. With that initial capital, a company was created that is managed by a workers' cooperative (today, Cooperativa la diaria is composed of 40 percent of the workers of the company).

The next step was trying to get subscriptions. They managed to reach 1,200 people who decided to pay in exchange for a newspaper that did not yet exist, but who were convinced by la diaria's pitch.



Cover of the March 10, 2018 weekend edition of la diaria (Courtesy)

## First innovation: creating a logistics company

The first major innovation in la diaria's business model was the bet on creating its own distribution system. "We were certain," Osta said, "that we had to create a distribution channel of our own, because there was a lot of dependence and [there were] very damaging rules that the monopoly of distribution of newspapers and magazines wanted to impose on us." "And that was in a certain way the original success: although it increased the challenge of creating a logistics company, as well as a journalistic one, it allowed us to build a direct link with the people," the general manager added.

Today, of the 137 employees at la diaria, 56 work in distribution, handing out the print paper everyday to the homes of subscribers throughout the national territory.

## Second innovation: format

The next relevant innovation has to do with la diaria's journalistic model. Osta explained that "from the beginning, we proposed that the subscriber needed a summary. The claim was 'only what matters.'" Thus, the proposal was to launch a newspaper of just 16 pages in tabloid format, distributed from Monday to Friday, and in black and white, but "with close proximity to the reader using visual and written storytelling."



*Lento is the monthly narrative journalism print magazine launched by la diaria five years ago. Its director, Gabriel Lagos, said it was born "as an alternative to what the newspaper did, as a product that could be prepared with more time and a more tranquil reading." (Courtesy)*

From the beginning, la diaria bet on constructing "journalistic coverage of its own, which often generated some surprise; we were a rare case," Osta said. But for the general manager, "that rarity, all the weirdness that we built during those years, is today our main strength. The newspaper that depends only on you. That only offers you what matters." The subscriptions also helped to reinforce the idea of community, which is essential for la diaria's gamble.

Subscribers of la diaria "are possible because society was changing that way, if not we would be much more niche," said Lucas Silva, 37-year-old editor-in-chief of la diaria. He has been part of the project since its inception, first covering political and economic information and, since 2014, working as editor-in-chief.

For years, la diaria was published only from Monday to Friday. But last year those in charge decided to also bet on an edition for the weekend, which was launched in April 2017. "Also against the grain of any company manual," Osta explained, "we went out into the street with a print edition where the value object is very big and the attention we pay to graphics is, too." This weekend edition, which is distributed to subscribers on Saturday, has 32 pages and is printed in full color.

The initiative has been a success. The weekend edition, which has the most subscribers, costs about \$9 per month. And thanks to it, la diaria has managed to increase the sales for subscriptions 39 percent. The subscription from Monday to Friday costs \$23 dollars per month (the digital, which is discussed below, has a cost of \$12 per month).

According to data provided to the Knight Center by Damián Osta, la diaria currently has 12,503 subscribers, distributed as follows:

- 10,341 subscribers of the print edition (including those who receive la diaria from Monday to Friday and on the weekend. There are subscribers who receive both editions and are therefore not counted twice.)
- 2,162 digital subscribers, including those who get the digital edition of la diaria and subscribers of the verticals (at this point, Education)

Today, la diaria is Uruguay's second newspaper and even aims to challenge El País' leadership in the space, something that was difficult to imagine when the project was launched in 2006.

"When we started, we did not think that we would be able to be the second newspaper, and compete with El País for leadership. I think we interpret political changes well," Silva said.

According to data from the Circulation Verification Institute (IVC, for its initials in Spanish) that was provided to the Knight Center by Osta, for the month of October 2017, the leading newspaper in Uruguay, El País, had a circulation of 16,298 copies from Monday to Friday (6,275 in kiosks and 10,023 subscribers). The second newspaper was la diaria, with a weekly circulation of 6,807 copies (4,969 print subscribers and 1,838 digital subscribers). And the third was El Observador, with 3,192 copies (913 in kiosks, 1,611 print subscribers and 668 digital subscribers).

For the weekend, El País is first with a circulation of 20,315 copies, la diaria is the second newspaper with 8,189 copies (all subscribers), and El Observador is third with a circulation of 5,288 copies.

April 2 will be an important day for la diaria, since the redesign of the print edition that will be published from Monday to Friday will be launched. La diaria will become "a newspaper/magazine with 24 full-color pages," according to Osta. "We are going to enlarge the newspaper, but we are also going to reduce it in its format, so that it looks more like a daily magazine than a newspaper," he added. (The new print size will be 10.2 x 12.5 inches).

### Third innovation: digital subscription

In January 2015, la diaria launched its digital subscription with the aim of "transferring the building of community, that we had done around paper, to digital," Osta said.



*La diaria offers four different subscription packages. One is for its monthly magazine Lento, the second for the weekend edition, the third for digital access and the fourth for the weekly edition. (Screenshot)*

After just over 3 years, 16 percent of la diaria's subscribers are digital, and the goal is to double that percentage in the coming years. In absolute figures, there are about 1,400 digital subscribers who pay about \$12 a month.

To this point, the subscription model has been the following: users could read two news articles per day for free, and they had to subscribe to be able to consume the rest. However, la

diaria is modifying the system to offer 10 free articles per month without registration. Once registered, readers can read 20 more per month for free. To consult more news, users must subscribe.



As Silva explained, the content that appears on the newspaper's website was first in the print edition of la diaria. Additionally, four or five online-exclusive articles are uploaded online by a small team each day.

## Fourth innovation: a bet on verticals

La diaria's bet on strictly digital information is expanding in the form of specialized vertical channels rather than through the enrichment of general information.

In May 2017, the newspaper launched its first digital vertical, dedicated to the world of education. [La diaria Educación](#) is an information service specifically for the educational community in Uruguay. It covers information at the three levels of the Uruguayan school system: primary, middle and tertiary.

La diaria Educación is a monthly subscription service that also gives access to all of la diaria's digital content. It has a specific team of three journalists who specialize in the area of education.

Osta explained that, to prepare the launch of this product, "what we did was create an advisory board formed by subscribers who were experts in education, and assign three journalists to be exclusively dedicated to education. That allowed us to greatly improve the newspaper's journalistic coverage of the subject." One of the services of la diaria Educación is a specialized newsletter already received by 1,200 professionals in the educational world.



The solid performance of la diaria Educación –it has reached some 700 specific subscribers– has encouraged the team to prepare the launch of new verticals, which they refer to internally as "emerging." So, on April 2, a new series of verticals dedicated to the following themes will be born: Health, Work, Feminisms, Science, Sport (the latter will be called "Garra" or claw). Each will have its own identity and its own presence on social networks, although they will form part of la diaria's global offerings.

To launch these verticals, la diaria is expanding its newsroom, which is currently composed of 37 professionals. The aim is to have specialized journalists in each subject. They expect at least seven journalists to join the team.

The specific case of the new sports vertical, "Garra," is special: it is being created "in alliance with the soccer players" of Uruguay, according to Osta. Some time ago, "the Uruguayan soccer players organized themselves and created a movement called 'More united than ever' to defend their rights, and the meetings of that union were held at la diaria, on the ground floor of our newsroom," the newspaper's general manager explained.

The result of this close link is the new vertical, for which they are looking for 500 founding partners "who can participate in editorial meetings in some way," Osta said.

Those responsible for la diaria believe that, in the future, the print edition "has to be transformed into a sort of catalog of these emerging ones," Osta said. "We have a lot of specialized information that has a lot to do with the concerns, desires and obsessions of our subscribers, and in the paper edition a part of that information pyramid that emerges from a community of knowledge will be published," he added.

## Fifth innovation: la diaria LAB

La diaria's newsroom is located in the old city, in the heart of Montevideo. The ground floor of the newsroom was once a community space called Café la diaria, which has now been transformed into la diaria LAB. It's an innovation laboratory, open to the public, which wants to enable investigation, production and implementation of new journalistic formats.

Meetings of all kinds are held here with subscribers and other people linked to la diaria. They also prepare formal programs, such as a workshop on virtual reality and immersive journalism that was held in May last year and attended by subscribers and even journalists from la diaria's competitors.

## Sixth innovation: community of knowledge and creation

Those responsible for la diaria like to define their project as "a community of people who share information, concerns, tastes and knowledge," and who "accept paying a membership to be part of and make possible a space of shared sensibility," as explained in a project presentation document.

Osta believes that the *raison d'être* of la diaria is "to manage a community of knowledge." Seventy percent of la diaria's subscribers have university training. "Knowledge," Osta said, "can no longer flow unidirectionally. We have to find ways to give feedback to what we do and improve the journalism we make with the knowledge our subscribers have."

A good example of the function that la diaria wants to exercise as a catalyst for a community of knowledge is the [Río Abierto](#) project, which was one of 11 projects selected and financed by [ALTEC](#) (Latin American Alliance for Civic Technology). This entity is the result of an alliance between Omidyar Network, Avina Americas and Fundación Avina and seeks to promote the development of civic technology initiatives in Latin America.



*A virtual reality workshop hosted at la diaria LAB, in which subscribers and colleagues from other media participated. (Courtesy)*

The Río Abierto project aims to "democratize access to information on the quality and management of water in the basin of the Santa Lucía river and the Río de la Plata," as explained on the website. To do this, it uses information visualization tools and promotes awareness and citizen participation actions for the care of key resources such as water.

The origin of this project came from the controversial installation of a new pulp plant in Uruguay by Finnish company UPM. La diaria wanted to speak with subscribers, scientists, environmentalists and governing authorities about what their informative role should be in relation to this topic. An alliance with experts from the world of higher education underscored that the situation of the rivers "was extremely critical throughout the national territory," Osta explained. That is why they decided to pursue the Río Abierto project, with the aim of offering clear information on the matter.

Subscribers played an especially active role: 900 responded to la diaria's survey on the use and care of water and their information needs in this area.



*A debate about Feminisms and the Future as part of the events of Día del Futuro from la diaria. (Facebook)*

The central core of this project is integrated by la diaria's project manager, Lucía Pardo, who acts as coordinator, Natalia Uval, who is in charge of the journalistic part, and lawyer Ana Tuduri, environmental activist.

Another project driven by la diaria that shows its capacity to become a catalyst for a community of knowledge is [Día del Futuro](#) (Day of the Future), which was created seven years ago. La diaria brings together subscribers and representatives from academia, civil society and political parties to discuss the future of the country. Each year a specific topic is defined and more than a hundred activities such as workshops, conferences or hackathons are held during the month of September.

As Lucía Pardo, la diaria's project manager, pointed out, the newspaper "poses to subscribers that they will be working on a specific topic in order to know who wants to participate and in what way, and to learn which topics they have specific knowledge in."

Pardo, who studied Food Engineering and joined the team in 2011 for the first edition of the Day of the Future, considers that "the in-depth contact with subscribers, who bring knowledge in multiple ways, as well as their commitment" is a great example of innovation. And this direct relationship with the subscribers is "a great strength" for la diaria, which other newspapers perhaps do not enjoy.

The event has gained prominence and two years ago the Uruguayan Parliament unanimously approved the creation of a Day of the Future for the country, which was proposed by la diaria, according to Pardo.

## **The next campaign**

"Let's do the impossible" is the name of the new campaign that la diaria is about to launch. With it, the newspaper wants to go a step further in its innovative strategy, since it has proposed that 100 percent of its budget will be paid by subscribers (currently the percentage that subscribers contribute is 79 percent of the total).

The novelty that la diaria intends to apply is the following: if it manages to reach that 100 percent, it commits to allocating all the money gained through advertising –which currently accounts for 15 percent of the budget– to finance new journalistic projects that will be chosen by members of the la diaria community.

According to the general manager of the newspaper, if they achieve this goal, "we will be increasing the amount and diversity of content that our customers receive, which in turn will make the digital subscription for la diaria more attractive." In absolute figures, la diaria calculates that some US \$30,000 per month could be allocated to financing new journalistic projects.

## Scarcity and innovation

At la diaria, innovation has often been linked to the lack of resources. Its general manager, Damián Osta, sums it up like this: "I always say that innovation is often the daughter of scarcity, and scarcity is a mark of our identity."

But la diaria's numbers are improving. Last year it had a total turnover of US \$2,480,000. As Osta explained, "today we are a newspaper that does not have losses." And the goal in the coming years is to grow.

# LESSONS

- Subscribers can contribute much more than just their money. If the opportunity is offered, many will participate with their knowledge and ideas.
- Having a physical space to interact with subscribers and readers directly facilitates the opportunity for them to feel they are part of the media outlet.
- Innovation can be applied in any of the media's environments, not only in the technological field. For instance, la diaria took on its own distribution.
- Vertical channels focused on topics that are of special interest to the media's audience offer an opportunity for business expansion.
- Innovation laboratories are a practical formula for concrete renewal efforts and searches for new solutions.





*Screenshot from the #ElijoAnimal crowdfunding campaign*

# **Animal Político shakes the Mexican political class with innovations in content, presentation and collaborative projects**

**By César López Linares**  
*March 28, 2018*

In Mexico it is common to hear the phrase "a little bird told me" when someone shares information whose source you can not (or do not want) to reveal.

That phrase had never made so much sense for journalism in the country as when journalist and media businessman Daniel Eilemberg chose a green-headed bird as the central character of what would become one of Mexico's most influential digital native news media outlets.

The bird emerged on Twitter as @pajaropolitico ("politics bird") in October 2009, a time when digital native media had not yet taken off in Mexico and the consumption of news on the internet was almost exclusively through newspapers' websites, which were essentially replicas of the print versions.

Eilemberg invited Mexican journalist Daniel Moreno to be in charge of the @pajaropolitico project. The bird had a specific objective: to be a character that informed and held a direct conversation with the users of that social network. That evolved into what is now a native digital media outlet that set out to innovate in form and content with topics that were practically absent from traditional Mexican media.

The innovation of @pajaropolitico began with that direct dialogue that few of the traditional media had with their readers. That's why, from the beginning, Moreno put a team of journalists in charge of the Twitter account.

"It's a team that confirms information," said Tania Montalvo, editor general of Animal Político. "If you send a message to any media in this country or a complaint, the truth is that you rarely get an answer, and we work in a totally opposite way. I am not working for the politician to read it, but for the citizens. I think that distinguishes us and I also think that readers value it very much."



That dialogue was a determining factor a year later, when @pajaropolitico went on to launch its website. Moreno and his team realized that the topics that most interested their Twitter followers were corruption, the environment, violence and the lack of accountability from politicians, topics that traditional media reported, but did not investigate thoroughly.

Throughout his career of almost 30 years in journalism, and his time in the most influential newspapers in Mexico, such as Reforma, El Universal, Milenio, Excelsior, El Financiero and El Economista, Moreno could see that these issues were reported by traditional media, but not thoroughly investigated.

"The fact that we have addressed the issues of corruption and human rights in an almost obsessive manner has made an important difference in a country where journalism tends to be very political. I think we have had the virtue of addressing these issues over traditionally political sources," said Moreno, now general director of Animal Político. "The investigations to reveal cases of corruption are not –by far– common in Mexican media. And in the case of human rights, the norm is to count the dead, reproduce the official version, revictimize the victims."

[Animal Político](#), considered one of the first exclusively digital media outlets in Mexico, was launched in November 2010 with the intention of working on these issues. At that time, native U.S.-based digital native news sites like [The Huffington Post](#) and [Politico](#) were in full expansion mode.



*Daniel Moreno, general director general of Animal Político. (Courtesy)*

Animal Político noticed that the majority of its audience was between 25 and 35 years old, and they realized that this sector of readers was not satisfied with the journalism of statements, but demanded harder evidence. For this reason, the site drew upon data journalism to support its reports. The editors knew it was important to understand how to communicate that information to their audience.

"Supporting a journalistic investigation with data, hard information, evidence and documents should be a requirement to be met by any journalistic investigation," Moreno said. "I am convinced that the journalists of Animal Político have learned how to use databases, how to process information, how to extract highly relevant journalistic

information from documents, how to cross data to find coincidences and revelations."

The site's team has made data management a part of its daily routine. Montalvo led Animal Político's project [NarcoData](#) in 2015, one of the most representative projects of data journalism in Mexico. It is the first interactive digital platform to explain the presence and evolution of organized crime in Mexico since the 70s.

Thanks to this management of data journalism, the work of Animal Político has had an impact on the reality of its country on more than one occasion. One of its most emblematic reports is "[Las Empresas Fantasma de Veracruz](#)" (The Ghost Companies of Veracruz), published in 2016, which revealed how the government of the state of Veracruz used a network of fictitious corporations to divert millions of pesos.

The project has a series of articles, infographics, videos and documents which were used to thoroughly explain the corruption scheme used by then-Governor Javier Duarte, who is currently in prison.

"I tell you without hesitation, without the report, Javier Duarte would never have been investigated," Tania Montalvo said. "He initially denied everything, but we continued to publish the evidence, and the pressure was so great that he resigned and escaped the country."

As a result of "The Ghost Companies of Veracruz," which was carried out in collaboration with the organization [Mexicanos contra la Corrupción y la Impunidad](#), Animal Político put the issue of corruption at the center of media political coverage, largely thanks to the way in which they presented such complex information, so that it was easy to understand.



Screenshot of the report "The Ghost Companies of Veracruz."

For the distribution of the report in social networks, the editors decided to use emojis, which was not common for a serious media outlet, especially with a subject as heavy as corruption. The result was that the content also reverberated in audiences that don't frequently consult hard news.

"It was an editorial decision that finally had very good results," Yosune Chamizo, the site's information designer, told the **Knight Center**. "That kind of thing has helped us get closer to new sectors, because at the end of the day, Animal Político has very serious information and there is a group of people who maybe are not interested in this kind of content."

The report earned author Arturo Ángel Mendieta the prestigious Walter Reuter German Award for Journalism, which recognizes Mexican journalism. The announcement of the award said the jury considered it to be "[one of the highest impact works in recent years in Mexico](#)" and that it was "fundamental in exposing the excesses and abuses of a government like that of Javier Duarte de Ochoa."

Ángel and journalist Víctor Hugo Arteaga also won the [National Mexican Journalism Award](#) in 2016 in the category of Investigative Report. In the announcement of the winners, the jury noted the "[rigorous work of crossing information, verification of official data and on-site investigation, presented in a multimedia format.](#)"

But the team behind Animal Político's special reports goes beyond the people whose bylines grace the article. The site has learned that the scope of a report is multiplied when members of all areas of the newsroom are involved in carrying it out from the beginning.

"We work on the investigations as a team, it's never a single person doing it, it's a team of eight or ten people," Montalvo said. "There are two reporters with totally different skills who work together and who from the beginning are working with the editor with an external perspective, but also with a video team, a design team, with an audience editor. So the impact is much greater."

"It is a current need in media to have these three-part teams: programmer – journalist/communicator – information designer," Chamizo said. "This three person combo with these profiles is what makes it possible to do specials like this."

## The art of knowing how to present information

When working with huge amounts of data for a journalistic product, the design of information becomes fundamental. Therefore, the site decided to strengthen its team of multimedia journalists in January 2017 with a new video and design strategy and also created the position of information designer for Chamizo, who has experience in data visualization and a Master's degree in information design. The goal was to create multidisciplinary teams to meet the demand for formats that readers of native digital media want, which is more visual, understandable and easy to share in networks.

["La Estafa Maestra"](#) (The Master Fraud), another of the special projects from Animal Político that has had significant impact, utilized Chamizo's prowess with information organization as well as the multimedia team's presentation skills. It is a complex investigation that reveals a diversion scheme involving dependencies of the federal government, public universities and ghost companies.

The report, which was published on Jan. 10, 2018, involved the analysis and organization of multiple databases and information from three reporters.

"Each reporter works in a different way, and then you have to gather the information, because it is not necessarily standardized information," Chamizo said. "There were several months –two or three– for nothing more than to gather the information from the three reporters in a unified database to be able to measure what was happening. It was a fundamental step, and without that step we would not have published, yet."



*Journalists from the site learn that while content is the most important thing, the way in which it is presented is also fundamental. (Screenshot)*

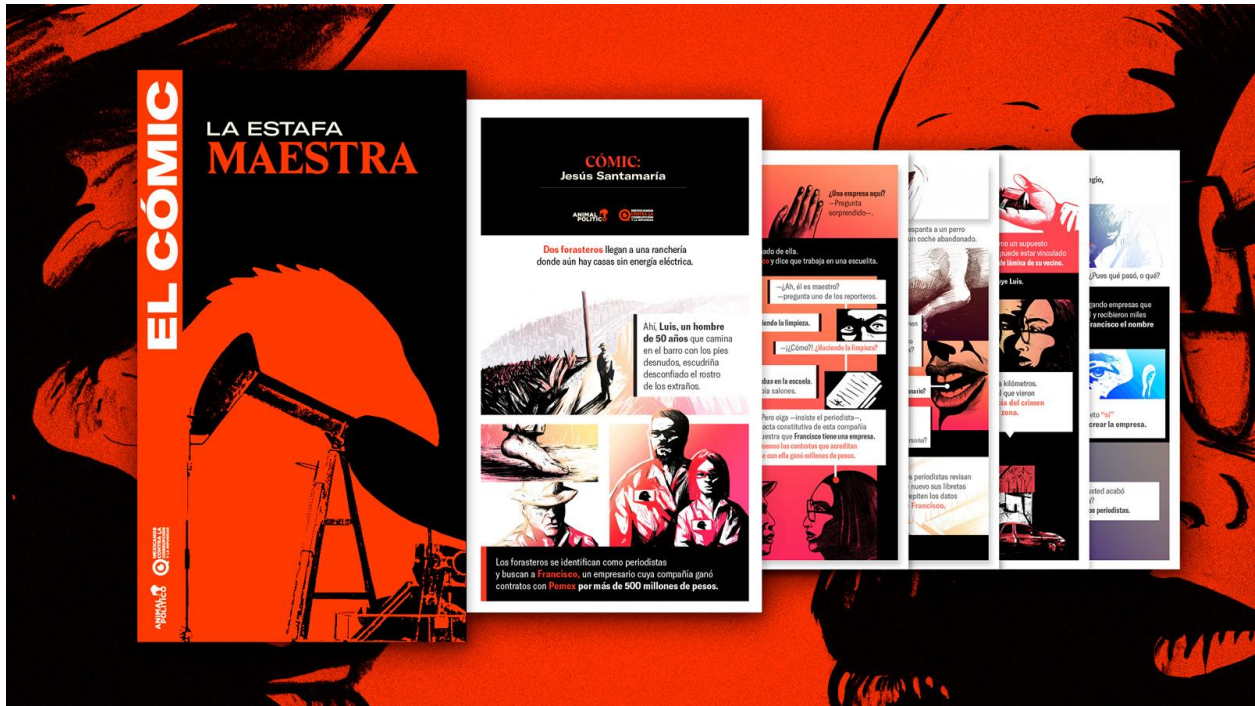
Thanks to the information design application, this huge amount of data could be translated into elements that are much easier to consume. The investigation was presented in several text, video and infographics reports and [even a comic](#). Each of these elements was aimed at the preferences of different types of audiences.

"It's a way to make information simpler, to simplify it without trivializing it," Montalvo said. "With the videos of 'The Master Fraud,' you saw them and you understood the fraud perfectly. But that did not mean that we lost views in longform text reports. There were entirely different audiences who were looking for different ways to find out what 'The Master Fraud' was."

According to Moreno, the attention to formats and the strengthening of the multimedia team translated into a significant increase in Animal Político's audience in 2017, in which it saw its highest number of readers in its almost eight years of existence.



"Last year we ended up with more than double the 2016 figures," Moreno said. "I am convinced that it was the sum of all those things, and one of them is the work of the video team."



*"The Master Fraud" included a comic that explained a complex diversion scheme. (Screenshot)*

## Betting everything on Facebook and Twitter is a mistake

For a native digital media outlet, a powerful strategy in social networks is of the utmost importance. The Animal Político team is aware of this, which is why it created the position of audience editor as a key position in its newsroom.

The audience editor is not only in charge of the site's two community managers, but also actively participates in the creation of the content, planning of specials and proposals for the presentation of the information.

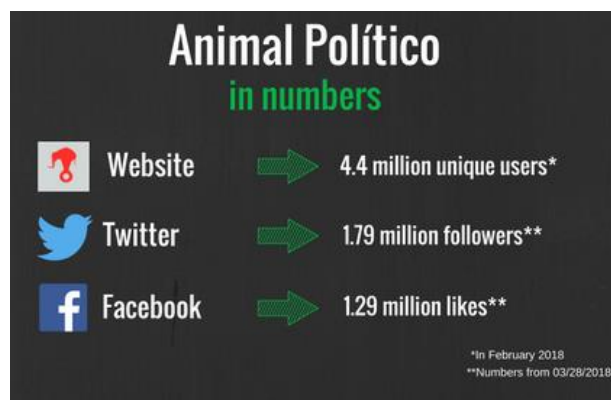
"Talking about Animal Político and talking about it solely as a social media strategy is not giving the whole picture," audience editor Jorge Ramis said. "It's a 360 strategy. It's thinking of it a bit in terms of marketing, not just concentrating ourselves on networks, but seeing all the types of channels for which an audience wants to receive information and trying to be there."

One of those channels is the newsletter to which readers can subscribe for free. One of Animal Político's priorities for 2018 is to strengthen this tool for attracting traffic to its site from email. In addition, they are considering the implementation of distribution channels for their content through WhatsApp or Telegram

However, about 60 percent of Animal Político's traffic comes from organic searches, 25 percent is direct access to the site, and only 15 percent comes from social networks. Ramis attributes the above to his team making sure that their SEO is highly optimized. The site has confirmed that basing a strategy solely on Facebook and Twitter is a mistake.

"You have to look at other channels, networks are not everything, you have to think outside the box," Ramis said. "Media that based everything on paid posts on Facebook, are now falling in traffic. We do not, because we turn to see other sides."

In February 2018, Animal Político registered a total of more than 8.8 million visits, and attracted 4.4 million unique users. In smartphones—the main platform in which Animal Político is consumed—it placed among [the three most read digital native news media in Mexico](#), with 3.6 million unique visitors, just below UNOTV.com (7.7) and SDP News (6.1).



To a large extent, the team attributes the good numbers in January and February to its "Master Fraud" special, which has been the site's most consumed story on social networks so far this year, and to the fact that it has involved the audiences team from the beginning of the project. They also note the diversification of formats in which the project was presented.

"When you involve an audience editor, a community manager, the conversation changes and they can come up with ideas that are different from what is normally done," Ramis said. "The team of audience editors proposed the title 'La Estafa Maestra,' and the hashtag. It was a great brainstorm in which many more minds with different profiles are involved and that is was ensured that the team work has been so productive and that the product has been a success."

## Pioneers in fact-checking

Since January 2015, Animal Político has taken on the task of evaluating the discourse of politicians in order to find inconsistencies and false information. [El Sabueso](#) (the Bloodhound) is the name of the site's fact-checking project, which uses a methodology inspired by leading fact-checking sites: [Politifact](#) and [Chequeado](#), from the United States and Argentina, respectively.

After three years, El Sabueso is one of the few fact-checking efforts that have been kept alive in Mexico, and it is the only one with recognition from the Poynter Institute.

At election time, fact-checking becomes a fundamental tool for journalists seeking to expose false information or the use of data manipulated by candidates. That is why Animal Político joined [AJ+](#) and [Pop-Up Newsroom](#) to convene more than 60 media, both digital and traditional, to take their project to verify discourse to another level.

This is how [Verificado 2018](#) came about in preparation for the country's presidential election. The project, which launched on March 12, has its own website and accounts on social networks. Since that day, dozens of articles have been released with the #Verificado2018 seal, which means that it is information that has been analyzed and rated according to their level of truthfulness.

"I am convinced that Verificado 2018 is an evolution of El Sabueso," Moreno said. "The spirit has been to serve the reader from a different format that consists of raising the cost of lying, not allowing the political class to be able to lie to people with impunity."

The site has joined forces with newsrooms like Mexicanos Contra la Corrupción y la Impunidad or AJ+, as well as with independent journalists, in order to carry out investigations. They've also given courses on methodology and investigative journalism to close to a dozen media.

"Regarding Animal Político's innovations, I would also add that we have opted for collaborative work," Moreno said. "I start from the basis that collaborative work is indispensable for the challenges that independent media and journalists throughout the country have."



*Verificado 2018 is a project AJ+ en Español, Animal Político, Pop-Up Newsroom and other allied media. (Facebook)*

The site has also made strategic alliances to disseminate its content with media from the interior of Mexico and smaller newsrooms. And collaboration has even occurred in sharing the physical space for its newsroom.

After the earthquake in Mexico City on Sept. 19, 2017, Animal Político's office building suffered significant damage and had to be evacuated. Despite not having a physical newsroom, the team intensified its work and developed [coverage tagged with #Sismo19S](#) with the support of Mexicanos Contra la Corrupción y la Impunidad, which hosted it in its facilities.

Alliances with other media also have commercial and business advantages. In 2018, Animal Político joined Grupo Editorial Criterio, which publishes the magazine [Newsweek en Español](#) and operates several newspapers in different states in the country.

The objective is to take advantage

of the commercial strength of a well-positioned traditional media outlet and at the same time to take advantage of new channels to disseminate content.

"They have a lot more experience with business, sales, which was very complicated and we did not have as much capacity to do," Montalvo said. "Newsweek is a huge broadcasting channel. Reading content from Animal Político in Newsweek is a plus."

Before this alliance, Animal Político had to make great efforts for its financing, like most independent media. The majority of its revenue—45 percent—comes from advertising via programmatic advertising, and another important portion—25 percent—from courses and consultancy to other companies.

From the beginning, the site had grants for specific projects, although recently that type of funding amounted to 25 percent of its total funding, thanks to contributions from organizations such as Open Society Foundations and Ford Foundation. In addition, thanks to its [#ElijoAnimal campaign, 5 percent of its revenue comes from crowdfunding.](#)



Much of its advertising comes from Animal Gourmet, its vertical site that focuses on food, which is more attractive to advertisers. In this way they have been able to avoid government advertising, which allows them to reinforce their image as an independent media.

"We are not the only media outlet that does not receive publicity from the federal government, but I do believe that we are one of the few that openly demand regulation of official advertising," Montalvo said. "We are with civil organizations that are promoting a regularization of the issue so that it is not used in the rest of the press for a form of control and censorship, and I believe that readers also distinguish it."

With the growth it has achieved over almost eight years, and after having positioned itself as a credible media outlet, Animal Político plans to continue expanding its reach through the creation of newsrooms in other Mexican states, or even to bring its journalistic brand to other Latin American countries.

Additionally, it will continue to explore new languages and forms of bringing information to their readers.

"Today Animal Político is more than I had imagined," Moreno said. "We have had the ability to adapt to time, to reimagine content, the language, to rethink how to converse with readers. All that has been rethought every day. So yes we say that we are in the spirit to imagine an ambitious future."

## LESSONS

- Involving community managers and designers in an investigative project allows for generating "out of the box" ideas, which can result in having a greater impact on the audience.
- For diverse audiences, presenting information on serious issues –like corruption, violence and human rights– in different formats and platforms, results in reaching audiences that do not precisely seek that type of content as their first option.
- The way in which information is presented is important, but must be secondary to the content. That is, the formats must be considered starting with the content.
- In digital media, it is vital to focus on a strategy beyond social networks. Exploring other media, such as newsletters or instant messaging, ensures the flow of traffic to the site.
- Although special reports have a great impact, the most read stories generally offer a service to the reader. (For example, articles on going through bureaucratic processes, important dates in the school calendar, new fuel prices, etc.)





*The ECOLab team at El Colombiano. (Courtesy)*

# El Colombiano's ECOLab re-imagined a traditional newspaper from the inside out

**By Dylan Baddour**

*April 4, 2018*

When Martha Ortiz accepted the offer to completely overhaul El Colombiano, a century-old newspaper in Medellin, Colombia, she resolved to question everything the news industry believed. Then she did it with remarkable results.

Ortiz, 48, lived close to journalism her entire life. Her family co-owned El Colombiano media group, so her grandfather and parents expected she'd be a journalist. In rebellion, she majored in industrial design at a Bogotá university, though later studied news media in Spain, English in England and business in the United States.



*Martha Ortiz, founder of ECOLab  
(Courtesy)*

Ortiz knew the story of traditional news media's decline with shrinking circulation, falling revenues and an emerging young readership that has proved tricky to captivate.

By 2009 she was working as an independent media consultant, conceptualizing and creating corporate and university websites, when she got the call from Medellín. Jorge Hernández, head of the other family that co-owned El Colombiano group, wanted her to redesign a smaller financial paper, La República, which she did to much acclaim.

But when they asked her to revamp El Colombiano, the century-old brand, she knew that no small set of tweaks would solve the problems that continued to baffle major media around the world.

So instead of a proposal to redesign El Colombiano, she handed in a proposal to convene a full-time team to reimagine what the newspaper could be.

"I said, they've got to quit being afraid, sit down to think and develop new ideas," Ortiz, who is now chief editor of the newspaper, told the **Knight Center**. "It's a change of the entire journalistic model, a change in content, of masthead, the whole strategy of visual communication."

To get that done, she founded ECOLab, named for the abbreviation of El Colombiano, an in-house innovation lab that has since overhauled a wide range of pieces of the El Colombiano media group.

It represents a distinct business model for the newspaper, an internal organ charged with constantly identifying potential for innovation at the company, then making it happen. In such a dynamic news market, Ortiz said, media have to be equipped to constantly adapt.

In 2015, ECOLab won the top award from the International News Media Association's Global Media Awards and was a 2016 semifinalist in the Society for News Design's best designed newspaper in the world contest. INMA judges [said](#) ECOLab "addressed hundreds of long-term innovations. It empowered employees to change their daily routines and innovate."

"The change in format, design and distribution of the newspaper was a challenge to a traditional and regional newspaper," said Juan Luis Aristizabal, president of the board of directors of El Colombiano media group. "This project was successful and has permitted the newspaper to continue being a profitable business during times when all print media are fighting to survive."

"Martha is restless and curious with respect to what's happening to media on a global level, and she understands the challenges faced by the industry in order to reinvent itself in an environment where it's complicated to monetize the added value of information and journalistic investigation," he added.

In the six years since its creation, ECOLab spent six months redesigning the printed paper, six months redesigning the mobile app, two years redesigning the website plus the neighborhood papers and the magazine group.

Before convening ECOLab, Ortiz offered some conditions to her director, Hernández. If the team was going to labor so tediously on such a large project, then Ortiz needed a guarantee that its changes would be implemented. She didn't want management stepping in at the last moment with its own ideas. And, she needed to take newspaper employees away from their roles for at least six months at a time.

Ortiz picked the team of nine, drawing people from every section of the paper, from photography and writing, to design and advertising. Then she told members to abandon the hierarchy—at ECOLab, managers and employees were equal—and all other responsibilities they had for the newspaper.

“It was a very patriotic commitment,” said Paula Andrea Montoya, a magazine design staffer who was drafted for ECOLab’s first project. “I was surprised by the rigor and the discipline.”

The team thought they faced big risks renovating El Colombiano. The newspaper, more than a century old, was an institution in Medellín. They worried that radical changes could damage the brand. Regardless, they began to assess.

The process started with analysis of the news market and El Colombiano’s place in it, identifying the important or distinguishing features of their media outlet and its strengths and weaknesses. Each person had to investigate and analyze 30 newspapers or media from across the world.

They conducted surveys and spoke with locals about their newspaper, took a tally of their own technological and personnel capabilities and hired anthropologists to help profile their audience.

Then the team listed every goal it had for the new El Colombiano and began the arduous process of tossing around ideas. Every problem requires three potential solutions in ECOLab—a natural solution, generally the obvious one; a “contemporary” solution, one slightly more radical; and an “artistic” solution, more radical yet. The tactic forced people to push their creativity, Ortiz said.

“We changed everything,” she emphasized.



Their studies showed that their new audience was globally minded and wanted to know how international trends relate to local issues. The team determined its printed paper shouldn’t bear solely news available on the web; it had to be “post-web,” analytical. ECOLab expanded the opinion section and added more points of view. It added a counterpoint to the daily editorial and inserted small fact boxes throughout the paper.

It dedicated more space for photos, which would be fewer, but larger and better, focusing generally on

creating a prettier product. It even redesigned the paper’s classic masthead.

It switched from broadsheet to stapled tabloid and selected what they considered web-worthy colors. It changed section names and eliminated section letters in the numbers of their pages.

“It’s like when you organize your house,” said Andrea. “You paint the walls, then realize the floor looks ugly and the furniture is old. The magazines started to look ugly.”

So the team redesigned the two weekly magazines, plus a weekly newspaper for children, El Colombiano. After six months of work, the team turned in their work to newspaper management and disbanded. At ECOLab, new teams convene for every project.

In 2014, ECOLab began working on a redesign of the newspaper website, a two-year endeavor. Website users increased by 20 percent after the new page launched, ECOLab reported. Subsequent redesigns of El Colombiano's neighborhood newspaper group prompted a 40 percent jump in circulation.

More than generating fresh-faced products, Ortiz said that the primary impact of ECOLab at El Colombiano is imparting a sense of creative energy among the staff, just as the news industry feels the constant pressure to innovate. More than 25 staff members from El Colombiano have passed through the innovation lab, and have participated in the process by which the traditional media can, though slowly, reformat themselves to fit a modern audience. Employees bring their experiences at ECOLab back to their desks when they return.

Andrea said, "I'm left with the mentality and methodology of ECOLab tattooed on my soul."

## LESSONS

- Nothing is sacred (reevaluate your masthead)
- Treat a redesign project like the tremendous task that it is, don't go half way
- There's a place for a "post-web" printed paper in the digital world
- Involve all departments in the redesign process
- Aesthetics are important, make your paper pretty





*Memetic Media's project El Surtidor uses graphic communication to tell stories, like this one about the selling of personal data. (Screenshot)*

## Memetic Media innovates in design and distribution, and focuses on digital journalism for young audiences in Paraguay

**By Carolina de Assis**

April 11, 2018

From the Paraguayan capital of Asunción, a group of professionals –including journalists, designers, illustrators and photographers– has been working for the last three years to build new digital journalistic narratives aimed at the country's youth. [Memetic Media](#), a non-profit association founded in 2016, brings together three media projects that share innovations in format, language and journalistic approach. The intent is to engage those neglected audiences, according to the editors.

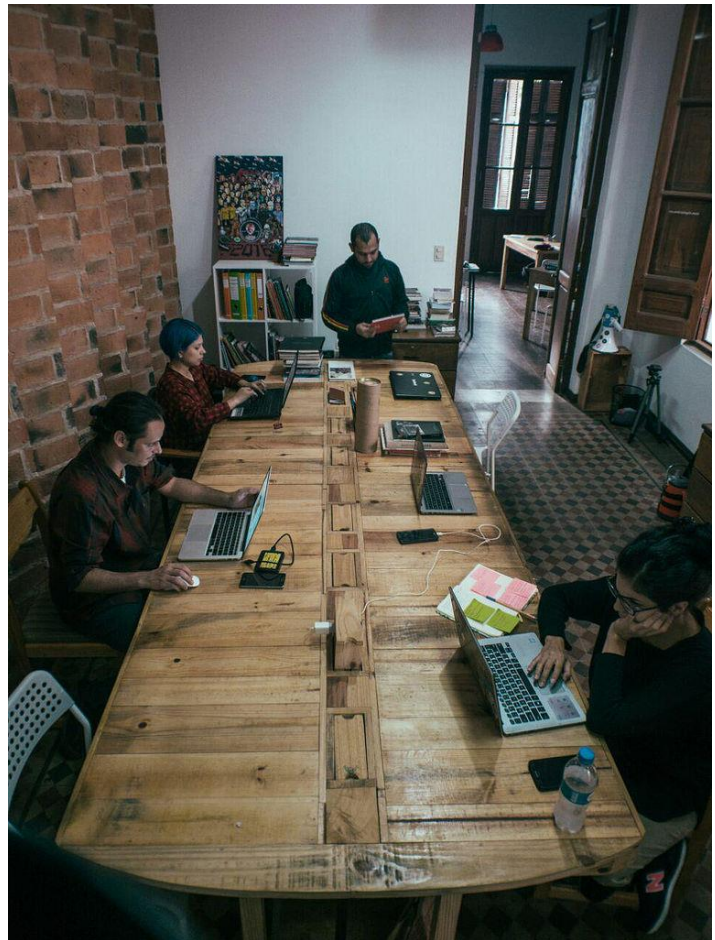
“A bet on the youth is a political bet,” Juan Heilborn, co-founder and one of the nine members of Memetic Media, told the **Knight Center**. “It is the generation that should improve the country we have and try to give access to relevant information. On the other hand, it is an audience that is viewed as orphans, of the state, of communications, of their working families. Everything that is aimed at them is consumption or repression. And they have shown with student and university revolts that they are much more aware, that they do not want to be just consumers or products.”

Memetic Media's bet seems to have some bearing: in Paraguay, which has about 7 million inhabitants, young adults between the ages of 20 and 34 [comprise 26 percent of the population](#), according to the country's General Directorate of Statistics, Surveys and Censuses. "Even so, there is little attention to both public policies and services, beyond offers concerning consumption, and occasionally, elections," Alejandro Valdéz, co-founder of the organization, said.

According to Valdéz, in the beginning, the audience of Memetic Media consisted of "an urban public, that lives in Asunción, that studies and works and whose distinguishing characteristic is that they are part of organizations (movements, parties, networks, commissions, unions, student unions, NGOs, tech entrepreneur collectives). They use the internet heavily, many are opinion leaders in their areas and have a cosmopolitan vision. An age range of 23 to 35 years."

This description can also be applied to members of Memetic Media itself –the average age of members of the association is 34 years, Jazmín Acuña, also a co-founder, explained.

Acuña, Heilborn and Valdéz are editors of [Kultural](#), [El Surtidor](#) and [Fotociclo](#), Memetic Media projects that bring innovative elements to the production and presentation of investigations, journalistic reporting and urban photojournalism.



*The Memetic Media newsroom (Courtesy)*

## **A camera on wheels**

Photographer Juan Carlos Meza is photo editor of one of Paraguay's largest media outlets, ABC Color. After nearly four decades dedicated to photography, in 2013 his passion for portraying Asunción gave birth to [Fotociclo](#)– which eventually led to the formation of Memetic Media, according to Valdéz, editor of the project.

Fotociclo was born from the exchange of ideas between professionals and artists, among them Meza and Valdéz, who shared a workspace in the center of the Paraguayan capital."It's basically an urban photojournalism project, focused on Asunción, a city like many Latin American cities, full of conflicts, and Fotociclo puts its lenses on it," the editor said.

And Fotociclo is exactly what the name implies. Meza "climbs on a motorcycle everyday, on a cargo motorbike especially equipped to take photos and transport team members and go to the last corners of the city, take photos, and the team is responsible for turning those photos into stories," Valdéz explained.

The project's main characteristics are its close relationship with the audience and its strong presence on social networks, aspects that have become the core of other Memetic Media initiatives. "We live in

networks 100%, it is the Memetic project with the largest audience and the most consolidated community.”



*Photographer Juan Carlos Meza (Courtesy)*

Every day, at least one photo of some place in Asunción is posted to Fotociclo profiles on social networks. The images highlight the beauty of the city, but also its paradoxes and its deficiencies, and stir the feelings of the inhabitants of the Paraguayan capital about the urban space that surrounds them.

The project has grown with the online community that has been expanding over the last four years, and the team has also invested in creating offline ties with photo markets, exhibitions and "[photo walks.](#)" The tours are guided by the photographer or the editor of Fotociclo and by specialists in Architecture, Urbanism and History, so that the connoisseurs of the project can explore Asunción and photograph the city themselves.

These activities “go beyond journalism’s usual scope,” Valdéz said, and help to consolidate the relationship between Fotociclo and its public. “This connection with the audience also has to do with the fact that the project has a lot of art: it is street media, it is performative (there is a very special orange cart traveling the city every day, driven by a photographer who is already an urban legend),” he said.

At the end of 2017, Fotociclo launched [its first print magazine](#), which included more than 150 photos and was financed and "co-edited" by the public, Valdéz said. The team responsible for the project reviewed the



more than 3,000 photos taken by Meza that were published on Fotociclo's networks to identify comments and feelings expressed by the public about each image and decide which ones would be published. Then the followers were consulted through surveys in Instagram Stories: Book or magazine? Black and white or in color? What price range? How often should the magazine be published? "All questions that have helped us to resolve practical issues such as payment methods or shipping systems or themes," the editor said.

The initial 1,000 copies were sold out in three weeks— "a number that, for the miniscule editorial market in Paraguay, is very important and meant a lot for us," Valdéz said. The intention is that the magazine will be annual and also will become an outlet for diffusion of the images and stories recorded by Fotociclo. The next step of the project is to publish a repository online with all of the almost 300,000 photos that Meza has taken in the last four years, which they hope to create at the end of the year.

For the editor, Fotociclo "completed a cycle" with the publication of the magazine, and this is a moment to rethink the project. "It is a very committed audience, so now we are committed to generating spaces to build, to co-create stories together with that audience, therefore we are now in a process of just redesigning Fotociclo's process, with the hope of doing more collaborative journalism with the audience."

## Longform journalism to understand Paraguay

In mid-2015, while Fotociclo fascinated its followers on social media and led them to reflect on their relationship with Asunción, the team began to develop another project, closer to traditional investigative journalism.

[Kultural](#) publishes series of long reports that explore the phenomena and conflicts that affect Paraguay, said editor Jazmín Acuña. "The project is born from the need to tell stories that are not governed by immediacy and brevity, and that offer a different angle from which to look at and understand what is happening in the country," she explained.

The series published so far have taken in-depth looks at a variety of topics that may seem disconnected from each other, such as violence against women, the panorama of education in the country and the deforestation of the Paraguayan Chaco. All themes, however, connect to touch on social tensions and structural injustices in the country.

"Our greatest contribution is the depth with which we approach the topics we cover. Instead of treating events as isolated situations, we focus on the context in which the events unfold. We place these events as part of wider phenomena or conflicts that define the country," she explained, adding that [even a series on recipes typical of Paraguayan cuisine](#) has a relevant journalistic subtext: the struggle for food sovereignty.



To explore such complex phenomena in depth, the production of the series involves large teams of reporters, photographers, content editors, visual editors and creative editors, among other professionals, and intense collaborative work, Acuña said. She gives as an example the series "[Los desterrados no van al supermercado](#)" (Exiles don't go to the supermarket), about the conflict over land in Paraguay.



“The richness of the creation of the series lies above all in the exchange. The process of making the *crónicas* and reports involved a lot of debate, discussions, tests, among the participants. We meet weekly to make collective decisions about the direction of the reporting and editing work. In all, we dedicated approximately six months to producing the series.”

In addition to the longform reports, Kurtural intends to try out new formats to bring its stories to the public. The most recent experimentation was with narrative through sound, using [audio reports](#) in the special "[Ipukuma la transición](#)" (loosely translated as “It’s delaying the transition”), published on the 29th anniversary of the fall of the dictatorship of Alfredo Stroessner, who dominated the country between 1954 and 1989.

The special dealt with memory, justice and democracy in Paraguay under the shadow of its authoritarian past, and to talk about it, Kurtural invited people who were affected by the dictatorship. According to the editor, the format of audio reports is not explored much in the country, meaning it was “a new way of bringing people closer to what the dictatorship was, starting with the daily life of the people that lived under the regime.” For Acuña, “audio narratives generate a lot of empathy and open new doors for getting closer to people in a country that is eminently oral.” Therefore, podcasts and new audio reports are in the works for Kurtural’s upcoming investigations, she explained.

Trends in international journalism, data journalism and fact-checking are also on the Memetic Media team’s radar. The first will be increasingly incorporated into Kurtural, Acuña said, and the second is already part of the project with the [#LaPrecisa](#) initiative.

With methodology based on the experience of Argentine site [Chequeado](#), a pioneer in the region, [#LaPrecisa](#) verifies statements from Paraguayan politicians with the use of open data and other sources. The intention is to ensure that the public has elements to evaluate and question the topics that are part of daily debate and that inform the development of public policies in the country.

In addition to questionable discourse from politicians and members of the government, [#LaPrecisa](#) also began to tackle fraudulent news, often referred to as “fake news.” “We choose content that circulates in networks and chats that are of dubious origin and we verify their veracity,” Acuña explained. “What we do is spread the verification in Kurtural’s social media networks. If we find that the content is indeed false, we place the label ‘bolaterapia,’ which is a Paraguayan expression to describe everything that is a lie.”

According to the editor of Kurtural, this is the first initiative to verify fraudulent news at a local level in Paraguay. “It is a fairly new initiative that arose as a result of the upcoming presidential elections in which we saw that the diffusion of false information had increased significantly.”

Recently, Kurtural [started to invite the public to send content](#) it believes to be untrue in order for site staff to verify it. “We established a channel on WhatsApp and also on all of Kurtural’s social networks to receive concerns [from readers],” she explained.

The idea is to contribute to the fight against fraudulent news both with the visibility of the fake news phenomenon through fact-checking as well as “raising rigorous standards through the use of data, and motivating the audience to be more demanding and critical of the news they consume.”

## **Graphic journalism to spread on social networks**

A partner in the dissemination of the fact-checking carried out by the website team is the project [El Surtidor](#). Created in 2016 shortly after the formal creation of Memetic Media, it was the third project the company created.



*"The Defenders of the Chaco" from El Surtidor  
(Screenshot)*

Others, we go to the sources firsthand. Others are investigative data from Kurtural. And finally, there are our own editorial pieces, in which we take a position on some issues."

Some of the #LaPrecisa checks run on social networks in [graphic pieces](#) created by the El Surtidor team, with the incorporation of "elements of popular culture to make fact-checking more attractive," Acuña said.

The translation of journalistic reporting into captivating graphic pieces is at the heart of El Surtidor, which was born as an experiment, said Juan Heilborn, editor of the project. "The hypothesis –based on regional experiences– is that graphic journalism has the potential to circulate better in a country with low internet speed."

Graphic art is an important element for Memetic Media's team –co-founders Heilborn and Valdéz are both graduates of graphic design. They decided to produce a piece of graphic journalism to see what happened, and the experiment had great repercussions among the young public, Heilborn said. "We understood that, unlike videos, graphics do not need much bandwidth to circulate, which is fundamental in a country like ours with poor access to the internet," he explained.

The [number of Paraguayans using the internet in 2016 was 51.35 percent](#), according to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU).

From this unexpected success, came more findings: the first, "that the young audience was a group totally ignored by the local media, not only in language but also in topics," Heilborn said. And second, that the graphic pieces open a new possibility for distribution. "Instead of asking people to come, what we try is to go to the spaces where that public is: their cell phones through social networks and messaging services," the editor explained.

The themes El Surtidor covers are chosen at weekly editorial meetings by the team, formed by Heilborn, a reporter and two illustrators. The idea is always to focus on the themes of the moment and trending debates on social networks. The reporting varies according to the type of graphic piece to be produced, says the editor: "on some occasions, the sources are civil society research with strong data and we check with specialists.

At least three graphics are published on El Surtidor's social networks every week –the plan in the medium-term is to publish daily, Heilborn said. They tell stories, like that of [Paraguay's first female air commander](#) who stopped flying because of the machismo in the profession, recall important episodes in the country's history such as [the Paraguayan March of 1999](#), a month of protests, and contextualize news such as the [murder of a peasant](#) in the midst of the conflict over land that involved Brazilian landowners and Paraguayan public authorities.

Although many of the themes are serious, irreverence is one of El Surtidor's trademarks– many pieces bring a certain amount of mockery to, for example, [address a statement by a Paraguayan politician](#) or present [the main Google searches performed by the country's users](#).

“The references to popular culture and pop culture (which are similar but not the same) and a certain nonchalance and irreverence make our approach very different from that of traditional media,” Heilborn said. “We always remember what Eliecer Budazoff [Argentine journalist and editor of The New York Times in Spanish] told us: we must flee from solemnity like the plague.”

The differentiated approach also pertains to the themes and angles from which the information is presented. “Journalism focused on rights is not very common here, and we have identified issues that are sensitive and necessary that are very well-received, such as gender, the environment, non-discrimination, the problem of land, food, etc.,” the editor said. “We ask ourselves in a certain news context, what does our public need to know at this moment that nobody is telling them? And we give them information that otherwise does not reach them.”

In addition to the static parts that run on the networks, El Surtidor has a [site](#) that brings together animated graphic series, the most innovative content of the project, according to the editor himself. It's “a visual narrative designed for mobile in which textual information is combined with very simple language, illustrations that provide information, the dimension of movement and time, allowing issues to be addressed in greater depth without complicating the narrative,” Heilborn said.

Midway between illustration, GIF and animated video, these visual narratives are also an alternative to video in a context of decreased internet bandwidth, and the format was considered proper for fitting the technology accessible by the target audience, according to the editor. “The structure in how the information reaches the user is very similar to children's books, and I had not seen that in digital or analog journalism. When we were developing this format, whether it was going to work was a mystery. But the reception exceeded expectations, and we gained a new audience.”

The animated series hosted on the site can be shared on social networks and in messaging applications – the spaces where El Surtidor's content excels. “Multiplatform distribution,” Heilborn said, is also another innovative aspect of the project: “first we distribute content in three social networks, the site, two mobile messaging apps. Including our own sticker on Telegram. Then we went back to the analog, we printed posters and stickers, a fanzine is in print, a print magazine is planned for this year, exhibitions, workshops and conferences. We go where the community is, and interact with the people who value us.”

## **The challenge of sustainability**

By focusing on distribution via social networks, Memetic Media's projects do not consider the numbers of visits on their sites as the central axis of audience measurement, Valdéz explained. “On average, some of our stories reach 300 thousand people a week on social networks, of which at least some 50 thousand interact (react, share, comment) and about 15,000 end up going to the site.”

The editor of Fotociclo and co-founder of Memetic Media said he learned from Jeff Jarvis, a U.S. journalist and one of the leading thinkers of journalism in the internet age, that “Beyond these numbers, it is more important to be able to call your community by name and surname, and for them to respond. 200 people that come to the launch of a series are worth more than 50,000 likes on social networks. That is



why we are working on implementing different initiatives that allow us to relate more directly with the community, to produce and finance stories that are relevant.”

In order to generate community and bring the projects closer to the audience and vice versa, Memetic Media intends to strengthen online initiatives, such as establishing a direct channel to receive story suggestions, questions, suggestions and complaints, and to develop reports with the collaboration of the public through technologies such as collective mapping. Offline, the idea is to continue prioritizing face-to-face activities, such as the photo tours and presentations of its reporting series.

Another project is to open Mediateca, a space in Asunción where the Memetic Media team works and that is shared with the digital rights organization TEDIC, to the public. The mansion was built in the 1930s and has hosted the Fotoferia, the Fotociclo photography fair. The project is inspired by [Casa Pública of Brazil's Agência Pública](#), which is located in Rio de Janeiro and hosts exhibitions, courses, conferences and collective activities. The intention is to establish “a space of reference that will be open to the community, around which we will implement different actions, and which will also be sustained thanks to the program of partners that we are now designing and which will be implemented in the coming months,” Valdéz said.



*Fotoferia, a photography fair from Fotociclo (Courtesy)*

Memetic Media also focuses on generation of community so it can count on financial contributions from the audience in order to fund its initiatives. Sustainability is the biggest challenge, according to Valdéz, and Memetic Media seeks to overcome it with the diversification of revenue sources, which is the key to editorial independence and good journalism, the editor said.

Currently, the non-profit association is supported by international cooperation, with funds such as the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation in Germany and Diakonia in Sweden; alliances with local organizations such as TEDIC, and [Fundación Texo](#), which supports contemporary art; commercial agreements with private companies that sponsor projects, such as Banco Sudameris, which financed Kurtural's [#Artífices](#) series; and consulting in visual communication services.



Memetic Media's audience has also contributed to financing initiatives for Fotociclo, including through fairs and purchase of the print magazine that was launched at the end of 2017. But the main objective is for the public to become the main financier of the organization's projects, Valdéz said.

“Our goal is for our journalism to be so essential to the place where we are, to the context in which we develop, that it is the audience who will sustain this. Our hypothesis, and also knowing the experience of other media in the region, is that when the audience is the main financier, the possibility of independence is greater. Then it is like a virtuous circle: we have to generate community so that this community allows us to finance journalistic projects of quality, and the relevant information will allow us to increase the audience, as well as the influence on the issues that are discussed in our country.”

## LESSONS

- Try new languages and formats to present your content. Innovation in presentation can captivate an audience that would not necessarily seek out your content if it had a traditional format.
- Bet on building an offline relationship with your audience. Events and meetings make it easy to get in touch with the audience and help create a community of people who, in addition to enjoying your content, will want to keep their media alive.
- Diversify your sources of income. Journalism independence and the ability to do good journalism are directly related to revenue diversification.
- Diversify your distribution channels. Being on all possible online platforms and also taking your content to print channels amplifies your voice and opens up new possibilities for connecting the public with your media outlet.



*Editorial team of the Mi Voz online newspaper network in Chile (Courtesy)*

# Chilean network Mi Voz proposes ‘21st century agora’ with citizen journalism and regional coverage

**By Carolina de Assis**

April 26, 2018

In 2018, access to the internet and the possibility of expressing yourself through various platforms and social networks, like blogs, Tumblr, Facebook and Twitter are almost expected by a significant portion of the Latin American population.

In 2005, however, the scenario was different. The reach of the internet expanded slowly, but surely, and blogs were a recent invention that was beginning to transform the production of content online. In Chile, communications professional Jorge Domínguez and industrial designer Paula Rojo saw in this revolution the opportunity to act on some issues that they were worried about, such as media concentration and the possibility of building new realities from journalism. This led to the creation of the [Mi Voz](#) online newspaper network, which innovated by investing in citizen journalism and regional coverage that was heavily connected to the territories.

Today, with 15 digital media outlets distributed in 14 Chilean regions, Mi Voz is based on voluntary collaboration from "citizen correspondents," who write about the issues that affect the communities where they live. The network also has a staff of about 30 journalists and editors that produces regional and national content and coordinates the material sent by correspondents in the territories.

According to Domínguez, the network's general manager, Mi Voz's first objective was to create an alternative to media concentration in Chile, which has [one of the highest levels in Latin America, according to a 2016 study](#). The study pointed out that the situation in the the country's press is a "virtual duopoly" of the groups El Mercurio and La Tercera (Copesa), which account for 80 percent of readers and 83 percent of advertising in the sector, besides having a strong control over the regional press.

“Chile is a long country subdivided in regions, with a capital, Santiago, that is very centralized, where approximately 40 percent of the Chilean population lives,” Domínguez told the **Knicht Center**. “But the

60 percent who live in the regions had essentially a media group that gave them information, the chain Mercurio. On one hand, we were born as an alternative to that concentration.”

Mi Voz also sought to tackle “the urgency for citizens to take center stage in the conversation to build the city,” placing themselves as an “agora of the 21st century,” Domínguez said. “It seemed like a tremendous possibility to invite citizens to go to the field and be part of the construction of the reality of the territory in which they live,” he said.

## Citizen contribution to journalism



Map of the newspapers in the Mi Voz network (Courtesy)

This invitation to citizens was first made in Arica, a city of 180,000 inhabitants in the northern tip of Chile, on the border with Peru. There they held the first training workshops for citizen correspondents, which involved 600 residents. “We invited all interest groups: students, indigenous people, professors, businessmen, fishermen, as many people as we could, whoever allowed us to have a wide variety; and therefore the conversation about the territory was richer, it wasn’t the conversation of the elite,” Rojo, client manager of Mi Voz, told the **Knight Center**.

This first training was turned into a model for the future, carried out before the opening of each media outlet, until 2012. In the workshops, the future correspondents were presented with the possibilities offered by the internet, through email, blogs and social networks, as well as training for citizen journalism. “Many didn’t have an email address,” Domínguez remembers.

“We taught people who wanted to create their own channels how to use blogs, and at the same time we taught them how to be a citizen correspondent,” Rojo remembered. “How to be responsible first for the fact that you are the speaker, with name and surname, not with a pseudonym, how an article is constructed, and most importantly, how we make news that is a contribution to the community where it was made.”

The desire to invest in citizen contributions through journalism for the development of the territories was another important point for the creation of Mi Voz. Domínguez and Rojo remember that at the beginning of the network, for months they examined the first pages of regional newspapers across the country and found coverage focused almost exclusively on crime and gossip about celebrities.

“There was not one headline that built a reality that was relevant to the community that read that media outlet,” Rojo said.

“We did workshops, we showed the covers [of regional Chilean media], which were terrible,” Domínguez said. “Then we asked people if that was the reality they wanted to live in. The majority, not all, said no. There are many other things that are not the subject of media attention. They seemed very seduced to bring to light a story about a reality that was certainly more positive.”

An example, according to Rojo, may be the coverage of an accident. “If a significant person in the city died in this accident, why not instead of the accident highlight the person and the development he carried out for the territory? So we give a return that allows us to build something valuable and not stay in that morbidity that at the end doesn’t lead to anything.”

With this proposal and the 600 citizen correspondents trained in Arica, [El Morrocotudo](#), the network's first media outlet, was launched in September 2005. The model of the digital newspaper and the training with residents of the territory was repeated in another 13 regions of Chile until 2012, when [El Magallanes](#), the network's latest media outlet, was created.

"Through the first newspapers, from 2005 to 2012, we worked with about 30,000 Chileans in that training structure," Domínguez said. "It was wonderful because it allowed us to deeply know each region of Chile, to know its diversity, to give voice to those who did not have a voice."

## The editorial process

Cristian Mena, current general editor of the Mi Voz network, is one of the 30,000 who were trained as citizen correspondents. "I started when I was a journalism student," he told the **Knight Center**. "Since the projects [at my university] would stop at the professor's desk, I published them in El Morrocotudo, because I was also in Arica."

Starting as a correspondent, Mena was hired as a reporter and later became editor of the media outlet in his city. Knowing the editorial process "from the outside in," he participated in the creation of network media in five other regions. Mena also went through the commercial area of Mi Voz, working with advertising clients, and today coordinates the editorial content of the network's 15 media outlets.

He explained that the call for new citizen correspondents is always open, and anyone who wants to write for any media outlet of the Mi Voz network only needs to register for the site in question. The team then contacts the candidate and sends them a brief guide with editorial guidance regarding form and content. Among the guidelines is the need for the text to respond to the basic questions of journalism (what, who, when, where, how and why), to convey the opinion of the writer and a constructive proposal to solve the problem.

The editors agree with the correspondents about the frequency of the publications – once a week, a fortnight, a month. Upon receiving the material sent by the correspondent, the editors review it, check the information presented and check if there is anything for which the newspaper could be held legally accountable, such as plagiarism, copyright infringement or slander, Mena said, noting that the network is regulated by the Chilean Press Law.

The citizen correspondents are volunteers, and with the popularization of social networks, there was a decrease in contributions to Mi Voz's newspapers compared to the network's first years. Although they began with 30,000 correspondents, Domínguez estimates that the network today has the participation of about 5,000 people each year.



*One of the workshops for citizen correspondents of the Mi Voz network that were carried out between 2005 and 2012. (Courtesy)*



“When we started, there was no Twitter, no Facebook, and therefore there were not so many channels for people to express themselves,” Rojo said. “When these other channels appeared, the number of correspondents dropped much lower. We have a process of inviting them, making them feel that the newspaper is their newspaper and not ours, and that their content is relevant to what is being built.”

To circumvent this decline in citizen participation and take advantage of the content produced in the new platforms, Mi Voz’s media network today also curates posts in social networks and in the newspapers themselves.

“Sometimes a correspondent does not send something, but since we follow him on social networks we ask him for the content and we publish it without problems,” Mena said, highlighting that it is also important to pay attention to the new regional voices that are expressing themselves on social media. “We see that there are some new leaders, we see that they are commenting within our editorial line, and we invite them to participate.”



*El Morrocotudo, based in Arica in northern Chile was the first online newspaper founded by Mi Voz. (Courtesy)*

### “Laboratory of leaders”

Since the beginning of Mi Voz, the network has sought to raise citizen awareness of their capacity to focus on issues important to the region in which they live. One of the first impacts in this sense was the [“Quality Water Campaign.”](#) launched by El Morrocotudo newspaper in early 2007 with coverage of the high levels of toxic minerals in the water consumed by the inhabitants of the region of Arica and Parinacota .

The campaign reached then-president of Chile, Michelle Bachelet, [with the delivery of a petition](#) for change in the country’s law on the water quality standard, according to what IPS reported at the time. [Vlado Mirosevic](#), who was director of El Morrocotudo at the time of the campaign, was elected as a deputy by the Liberal Party in 2013 and presented the proposal for the adaptation of water quality according to World Health Organization (WHO) standards [as his first bill](#) in the Chilean Congress.

Mirosevic is not the only person from Mi Voz to be elected to a political position: according to Domínguez, throughout Chile there are municipal and regional authorities that once formed the ranks of the media network. One of them is [Geraldo Espíndola Rojas](#), current mayor of Arica of the Liberal Party. The journalist helped found El Morrocotudo and was its first editor.

For Domínguez, the conversion of newspaper participants into political authorities is a "side effect" of the network's proposal.

“The invitation we had from the beginning of Mi Voz was to generate a space that would provoke citizens to contribute to the quality of the conversation and to improve the city, working from a media outlet,” he said. “From these groups, leaders emerged who had the possibility of making their perspectives, their ideas known, and also a platform for them to join other people. Then, naturally, those people moved onto different roles in social, political and economic action.”

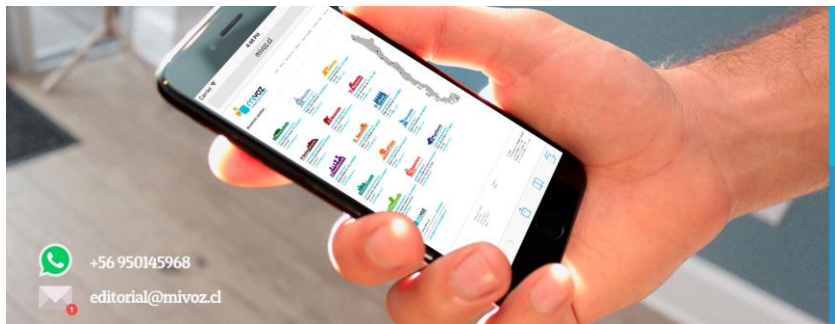
General editor Cristian Mena also believes it is "natural" for a network to not only form leaders, but also to be an outlet for different political perspectives from its citizen correspondents.

“Each person has their ideology and their point of view, and whoever wants to join the newspaper to expose them is welcome,” he said. “What we guarantee as an editorial team is that if someone from the right writes, we look for an interesting voice from the other side, or from all sides so that it is not loaded by one sector over the other. We can write about culture, about economy, about entertainment, but we will always have our political point of view in everything we express. Then in that sense we are not worried about people making political use of the media outlet, because the editorial team will ensure that just that person is responsible for what he writes and also seek voices that are different from those that are arriving naturally.”

## “Innovate with a purpose”

For Rojo, the main innovation contributed by Mi Voz was its commitment to citizen journalism and the use of blogs to build a media network connected to each Chilean region in which they are present. The current moment, however, requires them “to innovate with purpose” in order to stay alive, according to Domínguez.

This is due to the “agony of the advertising business model,” the general manager said. This is the model that sustains the network, which “does not and never has had contributions from the State or international patrons. It has done everything through the sale of products or advertising services.”



The Mi Voz network has 15 online newspapers that offer regional coverage from northern to southern Chile. (Courtesy)

The network of online newspapers is just one of the branches to which the company Mi Voz is dedicated. Its other arms are a social networking research center that works with big data, a digital agency and an area of social and technological innovation, Domínguez explained. According to Rojo, despite the objective of each unit of the company to be autonomous, they eventually need to allocate funds from the

other lines of action to subsidize the media network, “when advertising does not cover all” the costs.

(The founders of Mi Voz chose not to disclose their operating costs or annual advertising revenue to the Knight Center.)

Here, too, the expansion of social networks affects Mi Voz as they are getting the bulk of the advertising pie that until a few years ago would go to media outlets like those that are part of the network, commented general editor Cristian Mena. “So if we do not change the model, to make it more attractive and economically sustainable, there may be a nice story and we have to lower the curtain,” he said.

To prevent this from happening, Mi Voz is testing some pilot-projects that will help them answer a question posed by Domínguez: “How can we do something that contributes value to society and how do we recover that value economically?” As the projects are in the testing phase, Domínguez and Rojo chose not to give details about them, but they gave clues that it was not only a question of establishing new sources of income, but also trying out new ways to produce and present content from online newspapers.

“The media have to be understood as public goods,” Domínguez said, indicating that this aspect determines current transformations in the Mi Voz network. “There may be a private dimension, but it is available as a public good, such as a plaza, at the service of the community, and not the interest of the owner or funder.”

For Mena, “the major challenge is to reinvent us without losing Mi Voz’s historical line, to be an agora, and a place of greater freedom, of construction, with the identify of the territory.” This challenge also involves incorporating other formats, like graphics, video and memes, so as to “capture more attention and inform in a different way, not only through writing, which has been our strength, and to continue being a school of leaders, but with much more developed skills, now that the telephone facilitates much more,” he said.

Technological transformations are moving worlds throughout the news industry, strengthening even the citizen journalism that is the basis of the media outlets that make up Mi Voz. Mena sees this phenomenon as a "return to the origins" of journalism. “At the beginning, it was a trade, after it was professionalized, it arrived at the university,” the editor observed.

Citizen journalism, then, poses a challenge to professional journalists, he believes.

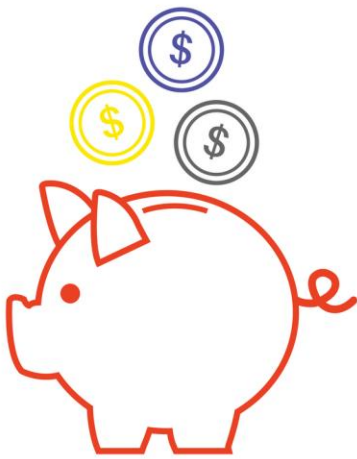
“I notice with many colleagues that the university prepares them to be soldiers and not engineers of communication. And that is the main challenge, for a media outlet to have more engineers of communication, a journalist with philosophical, ethical, sociological skills, because they will do more than generate content, manage content that is available to citizens. Today, with technology, what is left to communications professionals is to manage it much better and to contribute to society.”

## LESSONS

- Invite your audience to contribute coverage and content to your media outlet. Engagement is greater when readers feel part of the story they are reading.
- Connect your coverage to the territory. Local and regional journalism has a high capacity to engage the public and have a real impact on communities.
- Encourage public debate with the dissemination of different perspectives on topics of interest. The breadth of opinions and points of view also helps to consider different segments of the audience.
- Diversify your sources of income. Dependency on advertising can threaten the survival of your media outlet at a time when advertisers are directing their investments to social networks.

# The Ten Commandments of crowdfunding for journalists, based on the successful campaigns of Brazil's Agência Pública

By Natalia Viana, director, [Agência Pública](#)



Since 2013, Agência Pública has raised more funds through collective financing on the Catarse platform, the largest in Brazil, than any other journalistic organization. We held three campaigns, one every two years, to finance our Reportagem Pública (Public Report) project. In total, 2,429 readers supported us with R \$231,167 (about US \$67,000).

The figure may seem insignificant compared to international campaigns such as the one conducted by the Dutch website Der Correspondent, which raised more than 1 million Euros. But crowdfunding, like other fundraising strategies, depends on the local culture. And Brazil is a country that has little tradition of individuals donating to NGOs, and no tradition of funding for journalism. We were the first organization to raise funds for investigative journalism and, on the way, opened doors for other groups.

This will be, in fact, my first piece of advice to anyone who intends to venture into crowdfunding: **study your environment.** There are crowdfunding platforms in each Latin American countries. Are they doing well? What types of campaigns are succeeding – even outside the field of journalism? It is important to talk to people who have campaigned in their own country to understand what works and what does not.

Also look for the directors of these crowdfunding platforms. In our experience, it is critical to join a company that will support you as a partner, in fact, and will not let you down.

The second step will be to stop and think: **do I really want to do this?**

A crowding campaign requires a lot of energy. It is even more exhaustive than seeking financing in other ways, like through grants or funders. There is one simple reason: you will have to convince people who are not accustomed to paying for journalism to become donors.

But that's precisely the grace of crowdfunding. It is not just a way to raise money; it is a way to spread new ideals and invite people to be part of building something. Donors will have to feel they are part of a bigger project, a group with which they identify.

In our case, Reportagem Pública is also a call to readers to participate in our Editorial Board. Each donor receives, by email, three investigative proposals that our team wants to produce, and they vote every



month. The winning story is carried out by our reporters, who also dialogue with Board members through a closed Facebook group.

So think about whether this is the model you want for your organization. There are many independent sites that prefer to work with paywalls, for example, in a scheme that is more similar to buying a newspaper on the newsstands.

You thought about it? You're going to do it? Now think about **how you're going to convince a person to share their salary with you**. And think that this is almost sacred. Nobody has an obligation to give you money just because you do journalism. How will you persuade people that they will be benefitted by donating to you?

One appeal that works very well for journalism is to campaign to carry out a specific investigation because you will be able to mobilize people who are interested in that subject, even if they do not care a lot about "defending journalism." Or consider writing a book, because readers will see that their donation is actually an "early purchase" of a product that interests them.

We have always opted for "**all or nothing**" campaigns in which the money goes back to the donor if the goal is not met. This brings the feeling that everyone is part of the campaign and depends on everyone persuading more people to reach the goal. And that makes it all the more exciting!

Another important lesson from those campaigns is to **look at them as a marathon**, not a 100 yard dash. In Brazil, campaigns ideally range from 30 days to 45 days – that's a very, very long time –and you need to be prepared.

You need to have a strategy for each week, targeting different groups that might be interested, with a communication tactic every week, with different angles of the project, and use different campaign materials such as pictures and videos. A successful campaign does not go the whole time just asking for money. It explores other aspects such as rewards, support from well-known people, and focusing on the journalistic work being done and the promises of what will come.

There is still a golden rule for anyone who is going to carry out a crowdfunding campaign, which I can not help but remember: a person will only make a donation after hearing about the campaign 3 times. Therefore, it is necessary to explore different ways of getting your message out there. Do not just keep posting on Facebook. Look for websites that cover journalism to post a note, try to get interviews about the campaign on radio and TV shows, send a big mailing campaign, and of course, post ads on social networks that target people who visit your page and interact with your content.

Finally, I leave the reader with the Ten Commandments of Crowdfunding. They are mantras that, in my opinion, any organization should keep in mind at all times:

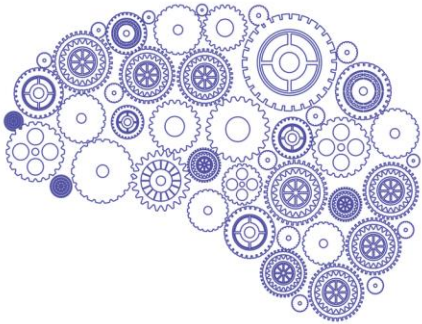
1. To convince others, you need to be convinced of the importance of your project. Be honest with yourself and believe
2. No one does a crowdfunding alone. You need to find partner organizations that will help you spread the word; involve your entire team; and get close readers, friends and colleagues who will carry the flag
3. Invite people to participate and think of ways to let readers feel part of the campaign
4. Think of good rewards that will attract people interested in receiving them
5. Be organized, develop a good strategy that varies from week to week
6. Be transparent regarding goals, intention and use of money
7. Look for various channels to publicize your campaign
8. Talk, talk, talk a lot about your project, talk all the time
9. Keep your word. Do everything you promise.

10. Celebrate every bit of support you receive. Keep yourself excited and keep everyone around you confident.

**Natalia Viana**, a journalist with 18 years of experience, is co-founder and co-director of Brazil's Agência Pública. She has covered stories of Tibetan refugees in northern India, indigenous people being massacred in Colombia and in favelas in Cancun, Mexico, human rights violations by the authoritarian regime in Angola and their relations with the Brazilian company Odebrecht. She is the author and co-author of four books on human rights violations: *Planted in the Ground* (Conrad, 2007), a denunciation of political assassinations in Brazil between 2003 and 2006, *Jornal Movimento, a Report* (Manifesto, 2010) and *Habeas Corpus: Introducing the Body* (Secretariat of Human Rights, 2010), on the political disappeared and the e-book *The Bishop and His Sharks*, on the impeachment of Fernando Lugo in Paraguay (Agência Pública, 2013). As a reporter and editor, she has won several journalism awards, including the Vladimir Herzog Human Rights Award (2005 and 2016), the *Comunique-se* Award (2016/2017), the Women's Trophy Press Award (2011/2013) and the Gabriel García Márquez award (2016).

# Chicas Poderosas explains how design thinking can help you become a better digital journalist

By [Mariana Santos](#), CEO, [Chicas Poderosas](#)



The goal with this article is to explain how can Design Thinking can help you become a better digital journalist, with a business mindset and collaborative skills. This has helped me a lot, and I hope it helps you, too.

Since the inception of [Chicas Poderosas](#) back in 2013 in Chile, while I was an ICFJ Knight fellow, the first insight I got while attending the Hacks & Hackers chapter in Santiago is that they were having a hard time attracting women journalists to the event. It hopes to be a matchmaking event for journalists and developers, providing a space for the co-creation of digital journalistic projects to empower access to data for the public at-large. Well, if we women are not showing up, we'll miss the boat.

This was an A-ha moment: we need to create a safe space for women to get involved and learn more about technology, using it in their newsrooms. One way or another, we are inside a digital society and we need to know how to move and use the platforms and methodologies in order to be able to work in collaboration, and dare to innovate in journalism.

Later on, in 2015, I became a Knight Fellow at Stanford University in California and had the opportunity to spend most of my time at the [D.School](#) (Institute of Design) where I was a fellow under the guidance of [Justin Ferrell](#). The goal there was to introduce a journalistic entrepreneurial problem we'd look into solving. Diving into the methodology of Human-Centered Design, I could clearly define:

1. my target audience
2. learn and understand what their needs were
3. brainstorm in collaboration with very bright minds from the D.School on how to achieve that
4. prototype to be able to fail fast and learn from what did not work
5. iterate and adapt my solutions until they matched the needs

The entire design thinking methodology starts with understanding our audience. Do you really know who your target audience is, what their needs are and what ecosystem they live in? Well, this is the first question we need to ask in order to understand what the problems really are, using data and analysis of their needs, rather than "I think they need x." Data can play a huge role in helping to address core issues.

It is a huge lesson of humility and a need to give up our journalistic assumptions and rather put on our anthropological glasses on and observe, a lot!

For a long time (maybe since 2010), The Guardian has invested in deeply understanding their readers in order to keep itself meaningful and a differential in the market.

I must admit that it is quite hard to implement this innovative approach in legacy media companies, and that in order to try something new, you will find a lot of reluctance from administrators who are naturally afraid to fail.

Allowing oneself to fail is crucial to innovation; while keeping a high standard of journalistic delivery, we MUST try new formats for storytelling, monetization and searching for gaps in the market. There is no hope in continuing to think that the advertising model that once worked out nicely for print will turn out the same way for digital. With ever-growing online platforms, the advertising market has deeply changed as well, finding other places where they can invest their \$ (Facebook, Google Ads, etc.). So, we need to be more creative here and dare more in order to stay in the game.

Independent news organizations, thinking globally but investing in local journalism, daring to do things that big corporations won't, is the differential in which we can invest. Nowadays, it's not the biggest who will win the market, but those who can better adapt to the ever-changing environment. Technology is key to connecting with our audiences.

This year at Chicas Poderosas we have launched an accelerator for women-led independent news organizations. These journalists may have never needed to know about business development, different possibilities for monetization, trying out uncommon business models, budgeting for the year or anticipating partnerships for collaborative development of ideas/projects. We believe that journalists now not only need to be extremely agile with technology, but also need to have an entrepreneurial mindset, to try out new approaches not fearing the possibility of failing, learn to prototype, test, pivot.

Journalism is still at the core of democracy, but it has been threatened by the amount of different platforms and channels for information sharing. As Cecilia Oliveira from Fogo Cruzado says, "There is no fake news, there are either lies or there is news." The question here is that all of those cross the same paths, and the audience can naturally get confused, manipulated and lose their trust in what they read online.

Well, I see in this crisis a huge opportunity for those who dare to tap into that problem, to be something different, not because they want to, but because their market is in deep need of a trustworthy source of information.

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**Mariana Santos** is the founder and CEO of [Chicas Poderosas](#), "a non-profit organization that aims to bring more women into technology." The organization works with storytellers across Latin America for training in entrepreneurship, business, innovation and design thinking.

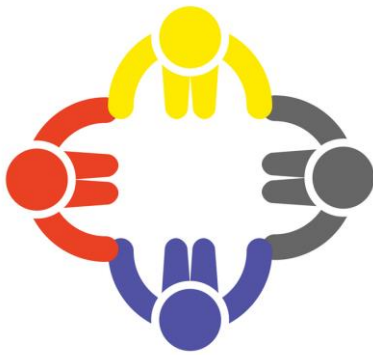
"Human values are at the heart of our collaborative approach, and we focus on creating transformative learning experiences," as the mission of the D.School at Stanford University explains. "In a time when there is hunger for innovation everywhere, our primary responsibility is to help prepare a generation of students to rise with the challenges of our world. Our deliberate mash-up of industry, academia and real-world problems is the key to our continuing evolution."

Chicas Poderosas uses this methodology that brings together: human centered design + business training to have the entrepreneurial mindset, and above all collaboration, as keys to success in our extremely demanding times.



# Collaborative journalism: keys to success for transnational projects in Latin America, according to Connectas

By Priscila Hernández Flores and Carlos Eduardo Huertas, [Connectas](#)



It seems like stories with a global impact, like the Panama Papers, awoke a sleeping lion in Latin America so that all kinds of journalistic collaborations are now being produced. There are many who want to replicate this emblematic case, and some believe that it is a matter of simply applying magic formulas and voilà! You have a high-impact story.

Moreover, it is easy to assume this because of the natural chemistry that exists among our peoples. It leads to, for example, three colleagues from different countries –such as a Mexican, a Venezuelan and an Argentine who are attending one of the many regional forums– forming a big party and becoming compadres for life in the blink of an eye.

**The challenge is how to turn that camaraderie into productivity. How can you turn this "party factor" into a "working factor"?**

There are several essential considerations that prevent this provocative form of work, making it a path lined with frustrations. The main thing to keep in mind for a successful collaboration does not involve sophisticated journalism techniques or complex technological applications. It doesn't involve a large budget or flashy announcements of agreements between media involved.

**The first key to get a project off the ground is humility.** Abandon the figure of the hermit journalist –no one knows what he is working on and he is greedy with his information. Become the journalist who recognizes that the reality he is interested in telling is more complex, that it exceeds his abilities, or even that, although he understands it, he knows he will achieve a better result for the audience with a collective effort. It looks more like ants that have a common project where each one contributes a piece of leaf.

**The next step is generosity,** something that requires going against a "chip" installed by media corporations for years as a philosophy of the trade, where the journalist's sense of "ownership" and information was unquestionable. The Panama Papers would not have been possible if Frederick Obermaier and Bastian Obermayer, the talented investigators of Süddeutsche Zeitung who received the large leak, had not shared it without restrictions with the International Consortium of Investigative Journalism (ICIJ).

In collaborative journalism, "mine" ceases to exist and becomes "ours." The most elevated concept in this equation is that of "radical sharing" proposed by Argentine journalist Marina Walker, deputy director of ICIJ. She refers to projects in which collaborators agree that all findings are assets of the investigation itself and not of the individual participants, regardless of the editorial position of each journalist.

**For a collaborative production, trust is indispensable.** Therefore, it is essential to know the person. However, the best party friend is not always the best teammate.

The ICIJ began when visionary Chuck Lewis brought together journalists whose careers and credentials were a guarantee of quality. Many of them are referents as teachers of journalism globally, and laid the foundations of the current moment. But the consolidation of the model has come from the hand of journalists with less exposure and more perspiration, adapting an expression of the Colombian Ana Lucía Duque. The work, professionalism, independence, suitability and good judgment of this generation are part of the keys that have opened the door to "membership" in these spaces.

Hence, a key to finding the best ally is to participate in the multiple spaces that foster training in the region and encourage the search for commonalities among colleagues regarding principles, values and related methodologies. This is the case of CONNECTAS, which, as a journalistic platform for the Americas, has been promoting high-quality journalism since 2013. Its proposal for "journalistic complicity" has already brought together a hundred journalists tested as ants in 15 countries in the hemisphere.

In our DNA, collaboration starts with the possibility of debating or discussing the editorial focus of a local issue and its structure with a colleague interested in helping, and carries through to the realization of projects of great importance, done in teams and with a transnational character.

**In order to develop a collaborative story, it is necessary to abandon this fear of speaking squarely, and implement something that, for regional cultural reasons, is hard work: clarity.** There must be clarity in the rules of the game, in the coordination of work, in the editorial decision-making process, in communications and even in differences. It is the antidote to headaches.

There are different motivations to collaborate. It occurs when several colleagues meet around an issue that would otherwise be dangerous to take on, as a strategy to achieve greater impact or from the need to expand working capabilities. These motivations can be based on the interests of someone who requires support, depend on a common theme with individual contributions, or the most complex: in total interdependence.

If it's important to have a clear path to follow while developing an individual project, the requirement is even greater in collaborative work. **The definition of a common hypothesis will prevent everyone from working on the subject as if developing their own article.**

The hyper-basic level of collaboration is to present the text of each reporter one next to the other. **But there is no doubt that the audiences will be grateful for greater efforts that explain the findings in structures that allow full and non-fragmented reading of the situation.** This translates into efforts with style, and writing, and that test the keys described above so that a good result is not wasted at the last moment. It is essential to respect the agreements of production times and publication dates.

**Verification and checking of all the material will be the seasoning to give more flavor to trust.** It is the guarantee that allows everyone to have peace of mind with the material obtained by someone else in the group.

It is a challenge for collaborators to work with the same level of excitement and energy about the findings until publication. **A good environment is an indicator that everyone involved in the work is enthusiastic and committed.**

**The success of the collaboration will not only come from the impact of the work. It will also come with the interest of carrying out new collaborative projects.**

As Frederick Obermaier shared in the Global Conference of Investigative Journalism in South Africa in 2017, **journalistic collaborations demand a high level of responsibility, logistical imperatives and, in many opportunities, extra costs and effort.** But it delivers better journalism with more impact, which opens the door to new projects and improves the reputation of those who participate; and among the journalists, the little ants, a fun and almost familiar brotherhood is generated. A fair mix of the "party factor" with the "working factor."

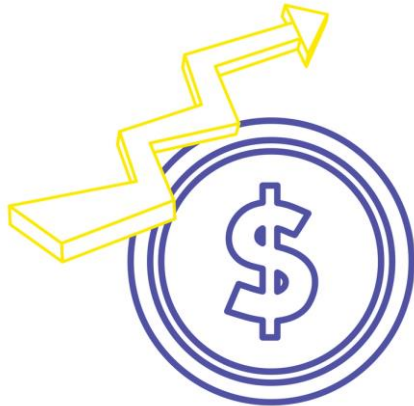
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**Priscila Hernández Flores**, is a Mexican reporter specializing in human rights. Hernández is an outstanding member of the CONNECTAS community, a journalistic platform of the Americas, and is participating in its journalistic residency program in 2018. She studied Communication Sciences and a master's degree in journalism from the University of San Andrés and Columbia University at the newspaper Clarín of Argentina. She has received different recognitions for her in-depth reporting on social issues with emphasis on disability, gender and migration. In 2016, she received the Prize from the Initiative for Investigative Journalism of the Americas from ICFJ/CONNECTAS in the category of collaborative journalism. In 2009, she was recognized by the King of Spain Award and was also nominated for the Gabriel García Márquez New Journalism Foundation Award. She has also participated in collaborative reports in media such as CONNECTAS, Ojo Público (Peru), Animal Político and El Mundo (Mexico) and Revista FACTUM (El Salvador).

**Carlos Eduardo Huertas** is the Director of [CONNECTAS](#) and also the Chief of Party of the Investigative Reporting Initiative in the Americas, a project of the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ). CONNECTAS is his latest entrepreneurial project that began in 2012 as a regional journalistic platform in Latam that promotes the interchange of information and knowledge about key issues in the Americas. It started during Huertas' period as a Nieman Fellow 2012 at Harvard University, with the support of the Knight Foundation. Now, this platform is consolidating in the region with the help of an alliance with ICFJ. For more than a decade and until July 2013, Huertas worked with Semana Magazine, a leading publication in Latin America, and he was its Investigations Editor. He began his journalistic career as a correspondent for the Press and Society Institute (IPYS) in monitoring freedoms of the press and of expression in his country. In 2006, he founded Consejo de Redacción (CdR), a professional association in Colombia that promotes investigative journalism. Since 2011, he has been a member of the International Consortium of Investigative Journalism (ICIJ) and has participated with them in several investigations, including the Panama Papers, which won a Pulitzer Prize in 2017. His reports on corruption, human rights violations, and environmental issues have earned him several national and international awards.

# How to finance independent digital media: 7 tips from Nómada in Guatemala

By [Martín Rodríguez Pellecer](#), director and CEO, [Nómada](#)



When I founded Nómada, the media outlet of which I am the director and main shareholder, I hardly imagined just how difficult it could be to finance quality journalism. Four years later, in the business and financial field, we are beginning to see the light at the end of the tunnel thanks to our business model.

**Here are the 7 keys:**

## **1. Diversify funding sources**

The first step (in 2015) was to approach a business incubator called Alterna. It supports projects in their initial stage to build their business models with a very attractive offer: You are charged as your sales grow. Surely in most Latin American countries there are business incubators.

From this moment on, we started to implement a basic business principle: You can not put all your eggs in the same basket. You won't have all the answers after incubation, but you learn as you put the ideas into practice.

Two years later (during 2017) it seemed to me that we were heading for an answer to this diversification question:

- 'Normal' sales of advertising and commercial products
- Sponsorship of recreational and academic events
- Content Agency, Nueve
- Grants from foundations (represent 47% of income)

Nómada's income in 2017 was US \$585,000, which represents 87 percent of our budget. We are very close to breaking even in our fourth year of operation.

## **2. Have a cushion, a base income that allows you to operate**

This is easily done if you inherit a fortune. I did not.

The first thing I did (2014) was to convert possibilities for consulting for international institutions, foundations and NGOs into journalistic investigations that could be public (or not). This increased the agility for reading and the impact for donors. And for me, I financed journalism. This allowed us to start demonstrating with facts that we could be a quality investigative media outlet.



That is not enough capital to have a journalistic team that would allow us to grow in our mission as a company and a media outlet, and I also sold shares to impeccable public figures. The price of 1% of the shares has grown from US \$10,000 to US \$20,000 in four years.

Additionally, a relative entrusted me with a property to mortgage and I requested a bank loan that started at US \$230,000, increased to US \$450,000 and now decreased to US \$360,000. Of course, we have always paid on time.

The most important thing is to decide how to invest these funds: journalism, social welfare and, key: positions and projects that can generate funds.

### **3. Make a bet, an investment**

To my generation of journalists, who decided to found more independent media than traditional media, we had to learn entrepreneurship (or nonprofit management) more out of necessity, as I think is the case with all entrepreneurs.

To try out this diversification of sources, you need to invest, to bet. You can not get enough income to finance a team of 8 journalists (including me) with only part-time interns or contractors, you need a commercial team.

So, from 2016 to 2018 we started investing in several positions:

- Fundraiser and administrator
- Sales Manager
- Event manager
- Audiovisual producer
- Second graphic designer
- Second audiovisual producer
- Third graphic designer
- Second sales manager
- Administrator (full time)
- General manager
- Manager of Strategy (Growth & Engagement)

That is, one has to bet, invest, and work so that this investment generates income.

That is to say, the commercial team and the technical team (design and production) now number more than the journalistic team (9 people) at Nómada.

#### 4. Test digital products (not just advertising)

I have news for you. Prosperity is not in advertising.

It is a wonderful tool for companies and institutions. For US \$1,500 you can reach up to 500,000 views and associate your brand with a media outlet that is appreciated by your readers for our work for transparency, democracy and a vanguard society (which promotes values, for example, such as gender equality or diversity).

But Google and Facebook ate the digital market and that means we can not charge for advertising that gets 500,000 visits more than what is charged for a page of a newspaper viewed by 50,000 people.

Similarly, digital commercial products, such as travel guides, videos of entrepreneurs or tools/games about brands, continue to be 43 percent of our income.

#### 5. Events

Inspired by the [International Symposium on Online Journalism](#) (ISOJ) and the [Texas Tribune](#), we had **three objectives** in mind for the production of Nómada events:

- Give our community of users other avenues for knowledge (Dixit talks, in the style of TED talks)
- Form a bond with the community and with each other (Festivals, Flea markets)
- Give our clients a sponsorship tool in which they can interact with our community in person.

Entrepreneurial journalists, while a banner has a price of US \$1,500, sponsorships for events range between US \$500 and \$20,000.

**In terms of a team**, one of the lessons is that you need to hire a person full time to organize it (you can start by hiring someone free-lance or part time), one or two people to look for sponsorships (plus the involvement of the director of the media outlet), and to have dedicated time from the administrator, the design team and the community manager.

Also, have a small fund to invest (you can start with a well-managed credit card or charge food companies for selling at the event). To rent the places for the events, to bring the lecturers or to buy the drinks and meals before the attendees arrive is not free. Additionally, sponsorships can take up to three months to become effective with large companies.

At the event, the participation of the whole team is necessary. Both for the relationship with the community of readers and so that the organization does not increase costs.

Ideally, you should think about getting twice the income of the investment. And income should be sought from consumption and attendance, but especially in sponsorships.

We have made Dixit conferences about media and the future, about women changing the world, about technology for social innovation and about corporate social innovation. The biggest we have done was in partnership with Duolingo (founded by Guatemalan Luis von Ahn, who is a shareholder of Nómada) at the National Theater in August 2017; there was an audience of 1,500 people and seven sponsorships that together with attendance and consumption totaled \$40,000 in income, 50% in profit.

We've done parties for anniversaries, Halloween, before Holy Week or events like an erotic toy market. The most successful was Halloween 2016, with 2,000 attendees, revenue of US \$15,000 and a 50% profit.

To contextualize, those two profits, on their own, would finance half a month of Nómada's operation. A combination of events is needed with other sources of income to finance the remaining eleven and a half months of the year.

## **6. The content agency: Nueve, by Nómada**

Inspired by [GK](#) (Ecuador) and [VICE-Mexico](#) and taking into account that there were companies that were interested in hiring our video, design, social media management and specialized political analysis services, we founded our agency Nueve.

The challenge involves managing the schedules of the audiovisual production, design and editing team.

Here we have made commercial alliances for large clients such as banks, the steel industry or beverage companies.

The good thing about this source of income is that it does not require more investment than what is already done, and having a quality team for audiovisual production, design and political analysis is good for journalism as well.

## **7. Strategic financial-business alliances**

In our fourth year, in which we have already begun to be part of companies with a social impact, we have sought two new alliances. One is with the Media Development Investment Fund, with whom we are about to restructure most of our debt (US \$310,000) to obtain better interest rates with technical advising. And also, another one with the Qomon Capital fund of Grupo IDC (Central American) that includes its income as shareholders (5%), restructuring of another part of the debt (US \$50,000) and technical advising.

In short, being a media entrepreneur is an adventure and a lesson as intense as being a journalist.

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**Martín Rodríguez Pellecer** (1982) is the director and CEO of Nómada. He is Guatemalan, persevering and cheerful. He started in journalism in 2001 in letters from readers. In 2011, he founded Plaza Pública for the web, and in 2014, Nómada. He received his bachelor's degree at the UFM and a master's degree in Latin American Studies at the UAM. He was a finalist in the FNPI award in 2013 and 2017. He won the national journalism prize in 2004 and 2017. He is a polyglot and a feminist. @revolufashion

