

At home in a social whirl

5 November 2010

Written by Nicole Madigan Everest.

Twitter, Facebook and other social media are a blessing for stay-at-home journalists, says Nicole Madigan Everest. Cartoon by Judy Horacek



As I put pen to paper – or fingers to keyboard – I'm surrounded by baby toys, an empty milk bottle and a torn-up magazine. Having read to my one-year-old, given him a bottle and settled him down for a nap, I'm free to apply myself to some dedicated writing.

That's not to say I haven't already been working – professionally speaking that is. Although the clock struck 11am before I swapped my dressing gown for daywear, I've managed to complete an interview, consider a story request, track a few sources and do a bit of networking – all with one eye on my baby. I've even prepped a batch of baby food and booked my next two ante-natal appointments.

It's an unconventional combination of tasks that less than a decade ago, would have been so much harder. While their role in journalism evokes strong opinion and fierce debate, it's thanks to the likes of Twitter, Facebook and other social media tools that I have combined stay-at-home motherhood with continuing my career as a journalist.

Of course the regular tugging of your hemline and constant demands for food are not as conducive to maintaining an effective train of thought as an air-conditioned office and access to the staff canteen. But without doubt, the rise and prominence of social media is allowing an increasing number of female (and male) journalists to embark on full-time parenthood without waving goodbye to their journalism careers.

Sites such as Twitter have provided the perfect platform for networking, source seeking and information gathering – particularly for those of us frequently confined to four walls. Feed your baby with one hand, tweet with the other.

Online leads services such as SourceBottle are effectively using Facebook and Twitter to connect sources and journalists through the internet.

But perhaps social media's biggest advantage to home-based journalists is its ability to keep us from disappearing into obscurity.

With member numbers in the millions, Twitter keeps us interacting with and connected to the communities that matter – readers, peers, industry members, politicians, entertainers – providing information quickly and allowing us to share our own.

Even mainstream media is fast catching on to the benefits of the social media phenomenon, using it to drive traffic at an increasing rate.

In 2009, the Oxford Social Media Convention found almost 10 per cent of the UK Daily Telegraph's web traffic was coming from social media. [Guardian blogger [reported it](#) as 8%]

For more personal contact, networking sites such as LinkedIn allow us to be "introduced" to new contacts, media professionals and like-minded individuals – both in Australia and abroad



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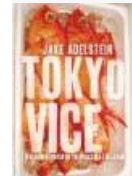


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– from our computers or smart phones. Better still, social media sites serve as a metaphorical megaphone to promote articles, news and professional updates. Quite simply, they allow us to promote ourselves. And then, of course, there are blogs – yet another interactive and increasingly popular online method of supporting our journalism. Blogging lets journalists engage readers and share opinions – from wherever they are.

The active parent/prominent journalist concept is perhaps best personified by Mia Freedman. Freedman started her blog, mamamia.com.au, after leaving corporate giant PBL, where she had been a successful magazine editor.

Working from home, she now has more than one million page views per month and more readers than many women's magazines – with zero staff and an operating cost of nothing.

"I can write for my website and my column from anywhere," says Freedman. "I write all day, dipping in and out with the kids. Things grind to a bit of a halt in the afternoon but I'm always back working after they're in bed."

Julie Posetti, a journalist and University of Canberra lecturer, says that research supports social media's position as an effective journalistic tool and, indeed, as an ideal means to ensure people are not left behind after starting a family.

She speaks from experience.

"My world opened up via Twitter [after having my daughter]," she says. "And the outcome has been very enriching, personally and professionally.

"I will often check emails, Twitter and Facebook on my phone before I even rise because once we're up, [my daughter] needs my attention.

"In between a stab at completing household chores and playing with my baby, I try to send emails, make phone calls and catch up with the news online."

Posetti says it is crucial to stay connected on your own terms during maternity leave or if you choose to work from home as a primary care giver.

"That way you can shape your professional life according to your rules and avoid being dragged back into office politics and other workplace nasties."

Of course, the use of social media and technology as a key means of managing a career requires essential changes and careful planning.

I chose to leave my position as an on-air television reporter in order to work remotely and care for my son.

No longer could I rush to the site of a potential story or approach people on the street. Nor could I gain professional recognition by having my face pop up on the television.

But by actively engaging in social media, I've enjoyed a richer journalistic experience, with many positive changes to my career. I've returned to print media, enjoying a successful and diverse freelance career.

Social media enables frequent and direct connection with the community, with readers, with the people behind the stories. Its diversity has opened my eyes to alternative perspectives and allowed me to quickly expand my network of contacts from all sides of the professional media spectrum. Love it or hate it, social media has certainly made its mark on journalism – and has indeed been a blessing for some of us.

Nicole Madigan Everest is a freelance journalist and feature writer based on the Gold Coast. She manages and contributes to The Mother of All Blogs

<http://blogs.news.com.au/couriermail/mothers/>

Judy Horacek is a freelance cartoonist.

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