

Larger Multimedia Packages

Planning and Production

Is your newsroom ready to move beyond audio slideshows?
Can you enhance an enterprise story with a great online package?

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Common Types of Online Packages

1. **The news package:** Big story, ongoing. Examples: Burma (BBC); Brothers Trial (Bakersfield)
2. **The evergreen feature:** Good for the long haul. Examples: Human Heart (NatGeo); 40 Years of RESPECT (Freep)
3. **The multipart information graphic:** Can be news or feature. Example: Virginia Tech shootings (NYT)
4. **The database.** Example: Raising Cash; D.C. Schools Scorecard (both Washington Post)
5. **The road trip.** Example: Frugal Traveler American Road Trip (NYT)
6. **The calendar event.** Example: SXSW 2006 (Dallas Morning News); Burning Man (Las Vegas Sun)

People

It is very rare that one person can report and produce a package as a solo project. Look for the right people to get the job done right.

Essential Personnel

- **Reporter(s):** People who gather information using tools that include audio recorders and cameras; people who can dig up information
- **Graphic artist:** Someone who can actually create illustrations and maps
- **Designer:** Someone who understands layout, color and typography

- **Producers:** Someone who can code a Web page according to present-day standards; someone who can make the package work properly online

Essential Roles

- **Team leader:** One individual MUST BE designated as the team leader and held responsible for the project's progress and completion. This role is *essential*. Any of the team members can serve in this role. (This is **not an editor**, in most cases.)
- **Researcher:** Often the reporter(s) must fill this role. If you have a dedicated researcher, so much the better.
- **Editor:** Obviously, someone is going to supervise the project. This person does not need to be a multimedia specialist or online editor. The editor is outside the team and must serve as a proxy for the readers, the public. Is the story good? Does it make sense? Are there gaps?

Planning Before Reporting

Before even one bit of reporting takes place, think about the package.

1. **Start with your questions.** Get the team together (even if at this point that is only one reporter and one editor) and bat around ideas for questions that the public might be expected to have. Then go outside the newsroom and ask non-journalists about it. Add more questions.
2. **Brainstorm about the story modules.** Use the questions on your list as a guide. Your first list of story modules might be a list of the biggest questions. Brainstorming is an absolutely essential step.
3. **Finalize the list of story modules.** This needs to be done *before you start reporting*. Three or four modules is great. More than six modules will lead to redundancy and package bloat. Resist the urge to add more.
4. **Plan the reporting for each module.** If you have not yet brought in the online producer(s), designer(s), graphic artist(s) and photographer(s), **DO IT NOW**. They have got to be involved at this stage, or else production of the package will be inefficient and disorganized. This step includes *setting up the communication plan* so that everyone working on the package knows how to coordinate pieces with everyone else!

Please note that the story should not be planned initially in terms of *media types*: “We want video! We want graphics!” If you follow the planning method shown above, you'll be able to decide which approach works best for each part of the story, for each of your sets of questions.

Common Elements of Multimedia Packages

Not every package needs *all* of these things, of course! Decide which media types and digital assets will work best to **tell the story** you are trying to tell.

- Maps
- Timelines
- Other explanatory graphics (animated or not; may include games)
- Still photos
- Stand-alone audio
- Audio slideshow(s) and/or photo gallery
- Video
- Text
- Reader feedback, whether displayed online or not

Usability of the Package

Whether people come to your package or not depends on how you display and promote it. But whether they **stay**—and experience all the fruits of your labor—depends on a number of factors. Will they tell their friends? Will they send more people to your package? Happily, these things are within your control.

- Navigation
- E-mail this
- Bookmark this
- SEO
- Brand identification: Your logo or nameplate, linked back to your home page
- Ad placement, relative to package design
- Positioning the story: Will anyone ever find the package on your Web site?