Day 2, April 5, 2014: Morning Session – 9:45-11:15 a.m.

Journalism Star Startups: Building Innovative Media Outlets for the Digital Age

Chair & Presenter: Michael Maness, Vice-President for Journalism and Media Innovation at **Knight Foundation**

Panelists:

- **Laura Amico,** CEO, Editor and Founder at **Homicide Watch D.C.**
- **Joey Chung,** CEO and Co-Founder at **The News Lens, Taipei, Taiwan**
- **Jake Horowitz,** Editor-in-Chief and Co-Founder at **PolicyMic**
- **Juanita Leon,** Director and Founder at **La Silla Vacia, Bogota, Columbia**
- **Emily Ramshaw,** Editor at **Texas Tribune**

Michael Maness: First up is Laura Amico. She's Founder, CEO, Editor of Homicide Watch. In 2013, she was a Nieman-Berkman Fellow at Harvard. And she's a California dreamer that grew up in Sonoma County. So, Laura, thank you.

Laura Amico: Thank you, Mike. I've never been introduced by my Twitter profile before. It reminds me that I'm probably due for an update. I'm five years into Homicide Watch, which is for me really hard to believe. We're a family business. My husband and I started Homicide Watch together. And because of that, a lot of people describe Homicide Watch as our baby. Right. We spend all of our time nurturing this site, nurturing this business, making sure it's growing. Which means that if Homicide Watch is five years old, it's in kindergarten right now, which is really hard to believe.

The other thing I think about is that one year in startup life is sort of like three years in regular life, right? So actually, when I look at Homicide Watch, this is 15 years of this child. And we've seen a lot of changes. And we've watched Homicide Watch grow and pivot and become different people in those years, and that's been really fun. In fact, it's been the best thing that I have ever done in my life.

Sunlight Foundation, a couple of years ago, two years ago, put together a really nice video of what exactly it was that we were doing in 2012. And I'd like to show you that video—it's pretty quick here—because it shows you where we were two years ago, what my day-to-day life was like, and where we saw our business. Oh, we don't have the video now. [*A man is helping set up the video*.] OK, just a second.

So, that's me at the courthouse. And that was what I was doing for the first two years of Homicide Watch. I moved to D.C. as an unemployed crime reporter. I'd been a crime reporter at the Press Democrat in Santa Rosa. Is it up and running now? I'll start in just a second. And this is how I spent my days.

Laura: Homicide Watch is a website: HomicideWatch.org that covers every homicide in D.C. from the initial crime report through prosecution and sentencing. It's powered by a database, but the heart of it is really a reported blog, where I do most of the reporting. I'm in court nearly every day following cases, tracking them through the system.

We're both from the newsroom originally. I had been a crime reporter in California. I really loved what I was doing and wanted to do it here. Unfortunately, no one was hiring crime reporters in D.C.

Part of the reason we started the site was because I had this sense that the conversation that we were having about violent crime wasn't complete, because we didn't know really who was being killed, where they were being killed, and what was happening afterwards.

Chris: A lot of what we try to do with the site in general and with documents particular is take things that are technically public and make them more accessible, more usable, more meaningful.

Laura: My approach, I like to say, is open notebook. Anything that I have on covering a case should be online. If it's important to me, it's going to be important to people following the case.

Chris: We have a searchable database of every court document that we collect.

Laura: I've learned that the typical news cycle of a story doesn't really suit the purpose of covering crime very well, because people come back to crime stories sort of on their own time and for different emotional reasons.

Chris: We know people come back to the site and they follow a case from start to finish, from arrest to indictment to trial.

Laura: So one Saturday morning, I woke up, and part of my news checks is to check my analytics, and I saw a search for 'Killing of Jamal in D.C., October 8, 2011.' And I saw a man was murdered on Quincy Street. So I started pulling together this information and saying, OK, 'Jamal, Quincy Street shooting.' I took those search terms to Facebook and to Twitter and was able to identify the victim in that case.

What I've realized though is that the point of being first isn't necessarily because we're in competition with other media. The point is that friends of Jamal were looking for information. They were looking for a place to go. They were looking to share their experiences and feelings. By having the information quickly, we created a place for them to go and react when they wanted to react, which was immediately and not 48 hours later.

I had one letter recently from a woman who said, "It felt like my father's death didn't matter until I finally saw his photo on Homicide Watch. And then I knew that people more than just me cared."

Some of the best moments working on the site happen when I see family members of one victim reaching out to family members of another victim, and being able to have created a place for that to happen is a really good feeling.

So, that's really where we were in 2012. And as I said, 2012 was a really long time ago in startup years. At that point, we had one website: Homicide Watch D.C. And it was a reported blog tied to a database that allowed us to create these victim pages and suspect pages that added context over time to the narrative of crime in D.C. And what that allowed was people to ask and answer questions about how the criminal justice system was working, and more importantly, how they wanted to see it work.

We solved the editorial problem of reporting homicides. We were able to do 100% of homicides in D.C. from crime to conviction with one person. Now, we solved the editorial side by solving the technical side. We built software around this process that made the reporter more effective and more efficient. What we hadn't solved at this point was the business side. And that was the third leg of the stool that we really struggled with.

The question was, how do you pay for this? The answers for us -- that we were paying for it ourselves. We were bootstrapped from day one with zero funding. We put our savings and our time and any budget that we had for going out or going on vacation into Homicide Watch, because it was a project

that we believed in, not just for the journalism of it, but for the community of it.

Now, what happened was that others started watching what we were doing and the community responded as well. From when this video was filmed in 2012 to now, our audience, which we were still very proud of then, has doubled to 650,000 monthly page views and 70,000 unique visitors. I will remind you this is with one reporter covering 100% of homicides in D.C.

The other thing that's changed is that we've moved into a student reporting lab model. When I received the Nieman-Berkman Fellowship, I had to leave D.C. And because we didn't have any money coming in, I wasn't able to pay anyone to take my place, which essentially meant that the site was going to die.

We ran a kick-starter campaign with help from a lot of friends—many in this room. Thank you. We raised $47,000. And that went to paying student interns to take over the work that I was doing. Now, what we've seen is that they are better at that work than I ever was and that part of the reason for that is because they have that strong software support to guide them through the process of what they need to do in order to cover homicides efficiently, effectively, and the value that they bring creatively.

This has allowed us room to expand, not just to other cities, but other beats. We now work with newsrooms like the Sun Times and the Trentonian to do Homicide Watch with them in Chicago and Trenton, New Jersey. We cover gun deaths in Colorado with the University of Colorado-Boulder. Northeastern University is about to launch Homicide Watch Boston. I'm actually teaching a class at Northeastern to students around these principles of structured beat reporting. We're working with WBUR, thanks to a grant from the Knight Foundation and the Boston Foundation, to apply the concepts of structured beat reporting to covering education reform in Massachusetts.

Now, all of this has happened in five years. Like I said, it feels like 15. We've been really busy. But we also think a lot about, where do we want to be five years from now? Two years from now? One year from now? We want to continue growing through our licensing partnerships. We want to promote more structured journalism work. Journalism that takes the daily beat reporting, that gives reporters the tools to be more effective and more efficient, that allows them to pull data and context out of what they are doing anyway, and then make maximum use of that and make it available to the community in ways that the community can understand, use, and further.

Finally, I love working with students! And one thing that I really want to do in the next years with Homicide Watch is to develop more student reporting labs in more cities, so we can get young journalists into newsrooms as good crime reporters. And not just good crime reporters, but reporters who have connections to the community, who know how to look through their analytics

to look at what the community is looking for, who know how to respond to comments, who know how to moderate comments, who know how to go to court and introduce themselves and say, "I'm here when you have something to say. Let me tell you the many ways you can participate in my coverage." And that's what we do in D.C.

Thank you so much for having me here. I really appreciate everything that everyone has done for us in those five years. And I'm going to leave you just with a couple of tips—things that I wish I'd known.

First is that this is a long-term commitment. When we started I thought, you know, *Maybe I'll give it six months and see where we are then.* And so being here today is really special. I also didn't know how hard this journey would be, and so having people along that journey with me has been more important than I'd ever known.

[Also] that I'd have to be more creative than I could ever imagine. I started this as a beat reporter with my scanner and my notebook and my camera running out of the newsroom in my hiking boots every five minutes to cover the latest story. And here we are today.

Finally, that I would never, ever, *ever* regret trying. I told you a couple of minutes ago that this was the best thing that I've ever done, and it is. And I can't imagine doing journalism in any other way right now. Check back with me a year from now, two years from now, and I will still be as proud, even though we might be doing this slightly differently.

Thank you. And I look forward to hearing from other panelists.

[*Applause*.]

Michael Maness: That was great. Next up is Joey Chung. He's the co-founder and CEO of The News Lens, which is one of the fastest growing digital sites in Asia. And [he] has just recently had more investment, and the investors noted the awareness of voices, the use of social media and aggregation, and something that particularly warms my heart—their emphasis on user-centered design as part of the reason they were excited about participating. So, thank you, Joey. Welcome.

Joey Chung: Thank you. Thank you, Michael. Hi, everyone. We're The News Lens. We've prepared a few slides to give you a quick overall idea of what we've been doing for the past couple of months. But before I get into that, I'll just give you a quick rundown of everything that's been happening.

So overall, we're a very, very young startup. The company didn't start operations until July 2013. The website itself, the platform, didn't go live until August 2013. So overall, we've only been operating for about seven or eight

months. But I think we're probably one of the fastest growing websites in recent Taiwan history.

When I was checking last night our monthly unique page views—I'm sorry—our monthly unique visitors, it has hovered around three million, and our page views has hit about seven million right now. So, we're one of the fastest sites going in Taiwan and we're very proud of that.

So in a nutshell, we wanted to be Taiwan's first and eventually Asia's most important social media or digital newspaper, so we're not doing anything about print or magazines. And so we started that in August, and as of now, we have about 180 writers writing for us. And on an average given day, there's about 40 pieces. Of those 40 pieces, roughly 20 are news aggregations and about 20 are columnists.

So for example, at 9:00 a.m. in the morning, there might be Taiwan news, all the news aggregation, at 10:00 there might be Asian news aggregation, and at 11:00 there might be world news aggregation, and after that, there's columns in banking, and social enterprise, and startups, and academics, and finances.

So, for example, we weren't joking that our average target audience might be a 35-year-old banker. We don't really care about anyone under 20. We don't really care for anyone that's over 60 at this point that still reads traditional newspapers. So, let's say you're a 35-year-old…. No offense. I included my parents in that. When I was doing this, my parents had no idea what I was doing, and I said, "It's okay. I don't really care." [*laughter*]

So, let's say the average target audience is a 35-year-old banker. You know, he wakes up from 9:00 a.m. until he goes home at 9:00 p.m. Everything that happens in that ecosystem where he wakes up—in our generation—he looks at his iPhone, you know, he goes to work either through subway or taxis or buses, he takes the elevator, he goes to work, he goes to—at least in Asia—it's mostly having lunches in food courts, and then you repeat the whole process going back. So, we want to be in that entire ecosystem for our generation.

So, for example, when we started work in August, in September, we signed our first deal with HTC, so in all the traditional Chinese markets, in HTC cell phone markets, our news pops out on their blink feed function every couple of minutes. Come October, we signed a deal with Microsoft Windows 8, so all the Microsoft Windows 8 operating systems in Asia, mainly in Taiwan, either it's desktop or laptop or cell phones, it pops up our news whenever. Come October, we signed a deal with this main TV distributor that has all the public places, those television sets that broadcast trailers or commercials, it broadcasts our video news about once an hour in all the food courts, all the movie theaters, and all the airports in Taiwan. And coming in November, we signed a deal with BTV. They own all of the public screens and all of the TV

stations and the buses in Taiwan. And in December, we signed a deal with Focus Media. They are one of the biggest public places TV screens in all of the elevators in Asia, so we have distribution in all the TV stations, the TV platforms in elevators. And as of February, we signed a deal with Taiwan Taxi, the biggest taxi owner in Taiwan, so those little TV screens in the back of the taxis, they broadcast our news about once every 30 minutes. And I'm in talks right now with Taipei Metro and all the other metro stations throughout Taiwan.

So the idea, like I said, from 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m., we want to basically be there when you're going to work, when you're looking at your cell phone. We have newsletters. We're on Flipboard. When you're heading into the office, when you're taking the elevator, when you're having lunch, when you're looking at your iPad or your iPhone. Everything. All of that entire ecosystem. We want to be kind of like that friendly guy next door or girl next door where you just lift up your head and you see, you know, fair, objective news.

Something I'll go into a little bit later is the Asian context is a little bit different. For example, in Taiwan, I would probably argue 80 or 90% of the major media platforms are owned by major media companies [and] conglomerates. And there's this huge sense of frustration. No matter how you guys feel, you know, how bad it is in the U.S., I would say it's 10 times, 50 times, or 100 times worse in Taiwan or Asia, where no one really trusts the TV stations or the newspapers. Because they are very, very biased or very, very left-leaning or right-leaning to the point that the headlines read completely differently.

So, there's that anger and frustration in Taiwan and Asia where we're really trying to represent that change, where our average age is about 28. Our staff right now, we have about 15 people full-time, and we really want to come out and really change that. So, we really want to represent that young generation coming out and only reporting news that we think is important, biased, and rational.

So, we don't report anything that's too gutter journalism. So, for example, in Taiwan right now, it's actually very, very common to have headline news about a porn star or headline news about some random carjacking or car accident. We only put up news that we think you should know or that we think is important. If it's not important, we're not even going to put it up there.

So, you come in in the morning for the news, and after that, there's columns. There's different columns across every industry, across every sector. So, going back to that banker idea, after you finish reading the news in the morning, you might be curious what's going to happen about the banking industry in Taiwan. [no audio from 0:06:26 to 0:07:08] —like your first regional, your local newspaper, like an overseas Chinese newspaper.

So, let's say you're a 50-year-old immigrant living in Vancouver. You don't have to read five different newspapers or ten different websites from Taiwan or Hong Kong or China. All the news that you want to know and all the columns that you want to know about that region will be on one platform, everything integrated. So, if you're a 50-year-old immigrant, you might be curious, what's going on in Hong Kong? What's the latest news going on out of Shanghai? And after that, you might be curious, what's a 25-year-old banker thinking about in Singapore? What's a 35-year-old student thinking about in Beijing? What's a 40-year-old startup guy thinking about in Taipei? So, all of those opinions, we want to gradually, gradually integrate them into one platform.

So, with that being said, this is my other co-founder and editor-in-chief. So just to provide some context, as I was saying before, in Taiwan and in most parts of greater China right now, there's a huge, huge distrust towards media. I would say it borders on anger. There was a poll a couple of months back where if you asked, what are the two main causes of chaos in Taiwan? Number one, the government, and number two, it's media. So, we're really trying to capitalize on that.

So, this is our 2.0 version that launched in September. We kind of revamped everything after a month. It still looks, in my opinion, pretty ugly, but we revamp the whole look maybe every three or four months after we grab enough data. It's mostly in Chinese right now. But something I was really, really proud of is, there's this little button over here. On our launch day, there's this button over here that you can easily switch over from simplified to traditional Chinese. So, it was kind of our little way of hinting from day one that this was not just going to be about Taiwan. It was going to be about the entire Chinese-speaking market or eventually greater China or even Asia.

Out of the 180 writers that we have right now, roughly 20% of them are outside of Taiwan. And we have like Americans writing from Silicon Valley. We have a few people writing from New York. They submit in English and we translate all of them into Chinese. But at the same time, there's a button on our page that says you can also read it in the original English form. So because of that, we're starting to get a lot of traffic from Hong Kong, from China, from Singapore.

We got blocked from China around November, three months after our launch. And I remember that day very, very well when we got that firewall block. One of our investors wrote an email saying, "You're not a true journalist until that happens, so congratulations." [*laughter*]

Also on our first day, everything was adaptable, so this is our iPhone version, so it's adaptable regardless if you read through iPad, iPhone, or desktop.

This is our 3.0 version. It's going to look much more modern. It's going on live next week. So, you know, everything is much more clearly into like

news, trending opinions, and videos. We started getting video. We started putting on video news in February, so we should be able to stabilize that by end of April. And coming in May, we're going to have an anchor come out and actually explain why we're choosing these different news segments. All of the news videos will be under 90 seconds, because that's roughly the time between one subway station to the next.

So, going back to the disruption theory, we really want to start from newspapers to magazines to online video. And I'm talking to digital cable providers right now and Google Chromecast, so maybe we'll go on to TV distribution sometime around June or July.

This is our media coverage. Since we were one of the few media startups in Taiwan, we got a lot of media coverage around December or January. And since we were going pretty fast, to our own surprise at the end, we invited our first strategic investors.

We welcomed our investors in December. They were Sasa Vucinic who used to work at the Media Development [Investment] Fund and Marcus Brauchli, the previous editor-in-chief of the Wall Street Journal and Washington Post. So, they are our first angel investors, and they are our board members as we speak.

And so, this was the original -- the line on the bottom was our original expected traffic. The blue line is our current traffic. It's a little bit dated. It was about a week ago. When I checked last night, it was closer to three million right now. And these are our page views. It went past -- it's close to seven million at this point.

The Sunflower Movement. So very quickly, I know I'm running out of time. I don't know if you've been watching the news in Asia, but the big story coming out the past couple of days was students basically stormed the legislative UN, which is basically the congress of Taiwan. They were protesting against this trade pack with China. And it was the perfect piece that I think symbolizes our coming of age and the coming of age of social media in Taiwan and eventually in Asia. It was a movement started by students. The entire social media, the platform, their main frustration was mainly based of students at the older generation. So, what we saw in the past couple of days was because we were focusing on being fair, objective, and a startup done by young people, we really wanted to capture that. So, we've been going really fast.

Our main editorial philosophy is, does the average Taiwan or Asian reader need to know about this news? Are we providing as fairly as possible all the important perspectives? And if we are, what does this have to do with the average reader?

So, I know I'm running out of time. So very quickly, these are the last few pages. This was the movement I was talking about in the last couple of weeks. So, this was very, very rudimentary, but we hired an anchor to basically report and interview right there through social media the government representative, the student representative, and different academic professors. This picture became very, very viral. It was our IT guy climbing into the legislative raid on the first night. So, we really wanted to showcase that we were for the students, by the students, and really trying to represent a fair perspective.

And this was interviewing a future mother about her perspective of what she thinks about this movement. Trying to get very, very diverse opinions out there.

This piece I was very, very proud of. We interviewed the wife of one of the police officers that was there to basically kick away the protestors. Trying to provide diverse, fair objectives.

And our most famous piece so far is, the literal Chinese translation says, "Can we fairly bring back coverage about this piece?" And it says over here, "Our photographer is going in at 77 hours." This is a mother writing a letter to the kids being still stuck in the congress building. This is [at] 79 hours—all the police officers resting at night. This is the actual movement during the day. This is all the lawyers and the doctors progressing their -- offering their support. And this is one of the government officials also locked inside the congress building. And we're trying to provide that fair objective.

So anyway, [that is it] in a nutshell. I'm sorry that was very, very quick, but we're The News Lens, and we welcome your comments and suggestions.

[Applause.]

Michael Maness: So next up we have Jake Horowitz. Jake is the Co-founder, Editor-in-Chief at PolicyMic.com, which is the voice of our generation. And I think he means *his* generation, not my generation, depressingly. And apparently based on your Twitter, you've actually met Obama. So anyway, thanks, Jake.

Jake Horowitz: Awesome. Thank you, Michael. [I'm] really inspired by Joey and Laura and real excited to be here today. My name is Jake Horowitz. I co-founded and I'm the Editor-in-Chief of PolicyMic.com, which is a news site for young people online. We've reached 14.5-million unique [visitors]. [I'm] here to share a few lessons about our growth and what I've learned about the way my generation consumes news and the way it's very different than our parents' generation.

So, first things first, I'm what the media would call a millennial. Born in 1987. I grew up on the internet. I use Facebook and Twitter. Is this thing

working? It was. Well, anyway, grew up on Facebook and Twitter. And if you ask the media, I'm also lazy, narcissistic, self-absorbed, part of the *me, me, me* generation. I think I live at home with my parents. I'm a taker. You name it. But truthfully, I've been interested in journalism my whole life and telling the stories that matter to my generation. Over the last several years, [I've] noticed three really, really, really important shifts in the way that young people consume news and information.

So, let's see if this is moving. [A man is working on the slideshow.] There we go. So, there's the millennials, the lazy people I talked about. And…there we go. So, three major shifts in the way that young people consume news and information.

So number one, embedded in this stereotype about millennials is that, you know, we're absorbed on our phones. We're only concerned about light, fluffy, and entertaining news. We don't have the capacity—because we're always on mobile—to care about really important and serious topics. I can say that that absolutely couldn't be further from the case. And that, you know, legacy media outlets have failed to reach this generation, not because we don't care about news, but because we're looking for a very different format, tone, sensibility, angle, voice than our parents are. And legacy outlets have been focused on our parents. You know, whether it's the crisis in Ukraine or a presidential election, young people care about real topics and PolicyMic is providing them with a platform and a voice to talk about real important issues. So that's number one.

Number two, you know, the homepage is absolutely dead for this generation. I can honestly remember when I was back in college being the uncool kid at the table. You know, I was reading the physical New York Times. And you know, there was a major shift back then where young people started going to online news sites. And we've seen a major shift in the last several years, where now it's no longer about online news sites, but it's about Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, Vine, and capturing young people in the feeds. [That's] where we're getting our news. And so, you know, it sounds so obvious, but I can't tell you how many people I talk to who don't really understand that, you know, a news site today is only as good as its distribution channels and the way that it captures young people in those feeds. So, that's two.

And three, you know, if there's one thing I know about my generation—and Jay alluded to this as well—it's that we are incredibly distrustful of mainstream media, of corporations, of institutions. You know, we've been lied to one too many times. And [we are] looking for a very, very different type of coverage. You know, stories that you're not hearing in the rest of the mainstream media. You know, if there's one person who's done this incredibly well for my generation, it's John Stewart. He's been successful because he's funny, but also because he calls out BS for what it is. And no matter if you're a Democrat or a Republican or a conservative outlet or a

liberal outlet, you know, he's going to point out, you know, where you're wrong and give you a type of news that feels more authentic and real for our generation.

So, having said all that, enter PolicyMic. Two-and-a-half years ago, I teamed up with lifelong friend, Chris Altchek, with the simple belief that mainstream media can do a lot more to empower my generation to have smart conversations about topics that really matter. It's been really, really exciting. In the last two-and-a-half years, we've grown. Last year, we grew about 650% and now reach over 14.5-million young people. We've got big plans for this year as well.

You know, we're focused on telling the stories that matter to our generation. And so far, [we] have done that in politics, and arts and entertainment, and entrepreneurship. You know, [we have] plans to diversify the scope of our coverage this year into books, and sports, and all kinds of areas. Also, to depth in our coverage, so we're going to be sort of telling stories through data visualizations, and infographics, and graphics, and figuring out creative ways to tell stories that matter, that resonate with our audience. So, that's all in the works for this year.

And I'm excited to do Q&A and take questions. But we'll just sort of show a few examples of how these three lessons have materialized in practice. So, you know, here we go with one of our pieces that we published on Ukraine. You know, again, on the first point, [the] idea that young people don't care about Ukraine is just totally not true. We published this piece: "To Understand What's Really Happening in Ukraine, Follow the Gas Lines on the Map." And important here was that sort of 'explainer' feel, where we're breaking down a really complicated news topic for young people. You know, sort of walking them through point by point that there's a narrative here that most of the mainstream media probably hasn't told you. This was one of our most shared and viewed and discussed pieces on our site.

Here's a piece that we published during the Olympics. We all, I'm sure, know the #SochiProblems, which was going viral. Maybe some of us were tweeting it when we were there. You know, this was a piece that [was] sort of on the point of reaching people in their feeds and understanding Facebook and Twitter. You know, we inserted ourselves into a conversation that was happening on Twitter, which was quite humorous, and funny, and lighthearted, and said, "Wait a minute here. There's actually real problems happening in Sochi on the human rights, and corruption, and LBGT rights front." So this was a nice counter narrative. Again, one of our most viewed, shared, and discussed pieces.

And finally, you know, here was a piece where—I mentioned it—you know, young people are fed up with corporations and politicians, and there's a skepticism here. And so, here was one of our pieces, which talked about sort of the illusion of choice and the fact that there's a handful of corporations

that actually control essentially everything that young people buy. Again, shared, viewed, and discussed pieces.

So hopefully, you know, we can dig into those three things in the Q&A, and I'm really excited to talk further.

Thank you.

[Applause.]

Michael Maness: Thanks, Jake. Next up, we have Juanita Leon. She's the Founder and Director of La Silla Vacia, an independent online media focused on politics and power in Columbia. And for those non-Spanish speakers, like myself, I think it translates into probably the most poetic news brand in the world, which is the empty chair.

Juanita Leon: Thank you. Hi, everybody. My English should be much better than it is, because I've lived in the states for five years in my life, but it is not, so sorry about that.

Well, La Silla Vacia is five years old. And I agree with you that one year in a startup is like seven years in life, so it looks like a long time. Our anniversary was last Wednesday, so we are really happy about it to have survived five years.

So, this is a news media about power in Columbia basically. My thought was that being powerful in Columbia means that you can choose what is said about you, what is not said about you, and how it is said. So, I thought, *Hmm, you know, I think we really need to understand how power is exercised in Columbia.* So, that's what the whole media is about.

We have 500,000 unique visitors a month, which compared to Taiwan is nothing, but in Columbia is quite a lot. And we are mostly read by people that have a university education in Columbia. And we are read by people that are not so young, but around 35 to 45 years old.

We publish five original content stories a day. We have a debate platform, where a lot of the opinion leaders in Columbia participate. We have 15 blogs where some of them are collective blogs [with] around 25 people blog. We aggregate all the political debate that is going on in Twitter. We aggregate news stories about the politics. And we have a live section where we believe that the world wide web now is the world *live* web. You know, that what is going on at that moment is very important to cover, so we do that. And we have gotten a lot into data journalism, so we have a lot of databases. That's expensive. That's difficult to do. We are a very small staff of only four journalists, but we are getting into data journalism.

But our real offer, I think, is that we are a community of people interested in public affairs in Columbia. We see ourselves as a community and also as a journalism blog. You know, we think that -- from the beginning with my partner, we thought [that] we want to see ourselves as a lab for the new journalism, you know, for experimentation, to really discover what this new journalism is about.

There's always a question about sustainability. Last year, this was how our revenue sources looked. 23% advertising. Advertising in Columbia for a site like ours is very difficult, because banks don't want to associate themselves with corruption stories, with bad news about politics, with the stories about corporations. They are very wary of that. So, we have found that our niche is in universities. So, we get a lot of advertising from universities.

52% of our revenues come from grants from the Open Society Foundation, the Ford Foundation, Net. We also give workshops and do some consulting to other independent media in the rest of the continent. They hire us, like, "Please tell us how to do this election coverage or how to do that debate platform." So, we charge for that. We did a crowd funding campaign. We started it three years ago. It's been quite successful. It's called *Super Amigos,* which means like super, super friends. And then last year, we got $40,000 in our campaign, which again in Columbia, that's a lot of money, because people are not used to giving away money, especially if you're not like poor or miserly, so that was really great. And we also do some events in the universities. More specifically, we do debates, like very high profile debates. We have a partnership with one of the universities in Columbia, and we get some money from that.

So, our achievements so far. I think having a half-million unique visitors, we feel quite proud about it. We are also the third most read online media by opinion leaders. They do a survey in Columbia every year where they ask 3,000 people from university professors, politicians, business people, NGO leaders, like, "What is the online media that you read?" And we are the third ones and the two ones above us are the two largest print newspapers. So, we really felt that with only four people and only five years, we are as influential with that group as brands that have 100 years.

We have had several scoops along our life and no lawsuits, which is great. I think we have become a lab for innovative journalism. We really have worked very hard in developing narratives that are non-lineal narratives, [with] visualization, graphics, databases, gaming, gamification of information. We are really into trying to experiment. Sometimes we fail really badly in what we try to do, but we are really trying all the time.

Our commitment in the newsroom is that we have to develop a new narrative every month. Something that we've never done before. So that's been really fun and good, and we've also tried to innovate in our relationship to the audience. Not only doing, for example, this crowd funding campaign, but also

we answer every comment. Every question that they do in the comment section, we answer it. We really hold a permanent conversation with them. And I agree with you, Jay, that it's not true that you don't have time for that. It's just that you have to incorporate that as part of your daily job. And for me, that's been very -- I think that has been a great idea, because you really have a different relationship with your audience. We have more than -- we have 610 super amigos, which I think is great.

I think one of the greatest achievements is that we have survived five years. When we started, we thought, *OK, if we survive for one year, that's great.* So five is a lot. I've had two babies in these five years, and La Silla has survived, which I think is a great accomplishment, because in a way that means that it has become more like an institution that doesn't depend totally on me. And I think that's -- I guess all the people that run startups know that that's a great achievement.

And I still have a car. I always thought, *OK, you know, if I don't have [money] to pay salaries, I will sell my car*. You know, I think that it's important that you set some limits for you, because easily you can go bankrupt. You know, like you're, "OK, I'll sell my car. I'll give my house." So I said, "OK, I'll go as far as selling my car." I still have a car, so that's a great achievement.

The challenges. I think people always say, "Well, the biggest challenge is finding the money." For me, at first, the biggest challenge was convincing good journalists to come and work with me. I used to work for Semana Magazine that is the largest magazine in Columbia. It is quite a good magazine, but we were always complaining. You know how journalists, we complain all the time, right? So, we were always complaining, "This is not independent enough." And we were always – we were always complaining. So when I set up the magazine, I called one of my friends that was a great journalist or *is* a great journalist, and I said, "Look, Martha, OK, I have the money. Come and let's make this independent media that we have always dreamed of. You will be able to say *anything* you want to say." And she was like, "No, well, I'm not going to give up on Semana." And I was like, "You have been complaining the past five years. Come on!" And she was like, "No." So, I discovered that, you know, journalists are people that are usually very traditional, very scary people that don't want to take those risks. So, that's been one of the biggest challenges. So, I decided, "OK, forget about these big-shot journalists. I'm going to bring really, really smart people from the universities and from other disciplines."

OK, to stay innovative, to do new things all the time is not easy. And our plans for the future is to become a social network platform around our content, so we are investing in that. And my other mantra now is to try to make money while I sleep, you know, because mostly all the money that we make is that I have to go and give a conference [or] I have to go and do

some consulting. So, now we're trying to develop ideas that we can scale and that can happen while we do other things.

And last, I think lessons to take away is how you see yourself as the media matters. If you see yourself as a community of people or as a business or as a lab, that defines a lot of things. I think that you have to follow artists and engineers. Those are the people that you really learn from. So, it's not always a good idea to just hire communication people. Each user is important.

The key is transparency. With me, I have made like especially like a great mistake. I said that the biggest Guerrilla leader was killed when he was not killed. But I think that we survived that horrible mistake because I was transparent about how I made the mistake. I went back, told people, "These were my sources." Like, "That's how I failed." So, I think people really appreciate transparency.

We aggregate the news, so we only produce regional content. I think news can be a trap. Have a unique personality. I think that's very important. We built upon existing networks, all the bloggers, okay. And I think that you have to dedicate [yourself] entirely to it. It's not something that you can do part-time, because then you will fail.

OK. Thank you very much.

[Applause.]

Michael Maness: Finally, our hometown host, Emily Ramshaw, who is the Texas Tribune Editor and enthusiast. On her Twitter bio she says, "I retweet because I'm interested. Aren't you?" So, I think it's a challenge for everyone in the audience. So, Emily.

Emily Ramshaw: Hi, everybody. My name is Emily Ramshaw. And as Michael said, I'm here to represent the home team, the Texas Tribune. And I see lots of super amigos of our own out here in the audience, so we are thrilled to have you all.

We launched in 2009 really at what felt like sort of the height of unease around the traditional revenue model for journalism. We launched as a non-profit, non-partisan, a politics and policy news organization focused primarily only on Texas; although, there is a little national coverage mixed in there. For us, the initial step on this path obviously had to be great journalism. And really, we've taken a three-pronged approach to telling those stories.

The first is traditional, dogged, beat reporting. We have reporters who cover basically every key policy vertical in Texas. We have a fleet of reporters, you know, sort of running up and down the halls of the capitol, and we actually have reporters who have been on the campaign trail. Texas, as many of you

know, politically is the gift that keeps on giving. And our elected officials here keep deciding or flirting with running for president, so we've had reporters in the national space too.

We started with about five-to-seven beat reporters in 2010, our first full year of operation. We're now up to about 15-to-17 plus a TV crew, plus a border bureau, a reporter up and down the Texas/Mexico border, plus two reporters now who are primarily investigative in nature, which is a space that we're hoping to move into a lot more.

Our content strategy: We provide in addition to sort of around-the-clock politics and policy news on our site, we provide a double truck—old newspaper word for you—of content in the New York Times on Fridays and Sundays. Basically, if you pick up a New York Times in Texas on a Friday or a Sunday, you'll see two pages of Texas-specific content. That's a paid relationship that we have with them, and that's been instrumental for our reporters [and] for our perceptions out in the world. It's been very valuable.

We also offer as part of our mission and our business model all of our content free of charge to every news organization in Texas—everywhere from Fort Worth all the way west to El Paso. Basically, if you go to a small town in Texas and pick up the local newspaper, you'll see Texas Tribune bylines and content. Same thing with the video coverage. We produce packages that run on TV stations across Texas. Radio stations, same deal. Basically, our goal is to make sure every news organization in Texas has access to news coming out of the capitol for free.

The second prong of our journalism is really data. From the very beginning, we focused on big data as being crucial to what we do. We believe that any data that we can get publically from state entities should be easily accessible and searchable to our readers. We have a soon-to-be four-member news apps team. We would like it to be even bigger than that. It does everything from build major data explorer, tracking, every readily available piece of data on all 8,000 public schools in Texas to interactive maps tracking the increasingly dwindling number of abortion clinics in Texas.

We also create interactive widgets. This one is an example from election nights previous where basically we offer embeddable tools where other news organizations or bloggers can say, "You know what? I just care about elections in X, Y, and Z communities. I'm going to build this interactive widget and embed it on our site." And then they have election results in real time, the same way the Texas Tribune has those results in real time.

So, the third prong of our journalism endeavor really is events. We believe very strongly that events are journalism. We believe that our readers, that our users should be able to be in the same room with the people who represent them, the same room with the people who they vote for, and the people who they and we want to hold accountable.

We have, in addition to a sort of series of free morning breakfast appearances that we have almost once a week at this point, we have basically a traveling road show where we bring policy-specific symposiums—whatever the plural of that is—symposia to university campuses around the state where you'll have people from the community who attend these events, policymakers who represent those issues in those communities at these events, and also tons of students, which is huge for us and great for our outreach among young readers.

We also have the annual Texas Tribune Festival, which is a major event that we actually host on the University of Texas campus. Two-to-three days every September. Virtually a who's who of politics and policy in Texas and in some cases nationally. Last year, I think we had 2,500 attendees. We're hoping for it to be even higher this year. And most of those are paid attendees, unlike our other events which are free to the public.

So obviously, you can't have the journalism without the business model. And I'm just going to pivot quickly. Some of you in the audience may have been at the Revenue Summit this week, but I'm just going to give a very brief overview of our business model.

When we started, we really identified five broad streams of revenue—areas where we thought we were going to be able to make our non-profit model work:

1) Major individual donors. For lack of a better word, very wealthy people who care in a very big way about journalism.
2) Foundations. Obviously, the Knight Foundation was a huge original supporter of us. The Ford Foundation. Basically, these are grant requests of very big foundations who also support these initiatives.
3) Corporate sponsorships, which is effectively corporate underwriting for the kind of work we do. You'll see there [are] advertising and sort of banner ads across our site and on the different sections of our site.
4) Memberships. This is sort of the viewers like you that you've seen for a long time in public television and public radio. Everything from the $10 student membership up to people who give $100 or $200 or $500 a year to support our work.
5) And finally, events, which is what I talked about a minute ago. Again, a small portion of that revenue is from people attending the events. Really, it's bigger picture. That's corporate underwriting of those events.

So, before I talk about those revenue streams specifically for a minute, I'll just give you a brief overview of our vital signs. If you look at 2010, you'll see we had about 29 staffers, revenue of about 2.25-million, an expense of about 2.9-million. It doesn't take a mathematician to look at those numbers

and think that you want to flip those revenue and expense numbers pretty darn fast.

If you look to the last full year, 2013, caveat, these numbers are not yet audited, but they're pretty darn close. We had grown to a staff of 40. You'll see our total revenue for the full last year was about 5.4-million, expense closer to 4.7-million, so obviously, those are numbers we are happy about and we're moving in the right direction.

So, just to look at our revenue breakdown. If you'll see, this is our first full year, 2010. Individual donors and foundations made up an overwhelming, huge percentage of the revenue that we had coming in the door. That's fantastic, and we really want to rely on those streams of revenue in a big way going forward. But I think if you look at it and you think about risk and you think about diversity, it was important to us to even out those numbers to be sort of closer to a fifth, a fifth, a fifth across those revenue streams. If there's a rough economic time, if suddenly your individual donors and your foundation money is drying up, you want to make sure that you have what we call *earned* revenue—those bottom three categories coming in the door in a big way.

So, fast forward to 2013, our most recent full year. Again, unaudited, but pretty close. We're getting closer to 20% across all those categories. You'll see that individual donors and foundations are still a huge part of what we do, but corporate sponsorships and advertising have shot to 23%, events at a huge 22%, and membership we're thrilled about. I mean, that's a number that just continues to grow. So, we've been very excited in that space.

Just a couple of quick initiatives that we're working on right now that sort of blend innovative journalism with potential new revenue streams. Some of you who are from Texas may have known that there was a very prominent filibuster in our legislative session this past year, where Wendy Davis, who's now running for governor, filibustered the state's very strict abortion regulations. We'd been livestreaming the legislature for a while. People tuned in here and there. Not that sexy. It's a bunch of lawmakers standing, debating a lot of issues. That Wendy Davis livestream that filibuster night, you know, midnight till two in the morning, we had close to 200,000 people watching our livestream. For context, that's more people than watched Edward Snowden when we livestreamed him a couple of weeks ago at South by Southwest.

So, we piggybacked on that and thought, we launched a kick-starter campaign to raise the funds to purchase really top-of-the-line live-streaming technology, so that we could be out in the field, out covering the governor's race, and livestreaming these events from the trail. We ended up raising even more than this $65,000—close to $85,000 that we used to purchase satellite backpacks [and] editing in the field software tools. So, that's been really phenomenal and a lot of fun.

You know, this is sort of a new school twist on old school newsletters. We've been rolling out a series of e-newsletters that focus on particular policy verticals. We're calling them Trib+, Texas Tribune plus something extra. Partnering with, in many cases, universities, researchers. So far, we've rolled out Trib+Water and Trib+Edu. I think we'll probably have a transportation site in the coming months. And then we'll probably have three more of these by the fall.

And then finally, we are next month rolling out something that we're calling Trib Talk, which is really an op-ed site sort of for the 21st century. We're going to be including solicited op-eds from key policymakers across the state, submitted op-eds from folks in our community. We're hoping for really robust commenting universe, very closely moderated. And we're also going to be using this site really as sort of a design laboratory to think about some innovative things we can do on the Texas Tribune. And potentially as also sort of innovative advertising space, we are going to be probably experimenting with sponsored content in some paid placement format on this site.

So, that's the Texas Tribune in a nutshell. Thanks for being here.

[Applause.]