

# Training Models in the newsroom

From veteran nerds to those just learning the basics of computer-assisted reporting, we are all in the process of developing better ways to spread these skills throughout our newsrooms. Many models are developing. No single model is the answer. That's why sharing experiences at gatherings such as this is so important.

Here's an outline of some training models and the benefits and drawbacks of each.

**Throw it at everyone and see where it sticks:** In 1994, when the Mercury News first put computers on desktops, we did intensive training in all the basics (Internet, spreadsheets, databases) for everyone.

Benefits:

- Everyone gets exposed
- Most basic skills are widespread
- Get a lot of buy-in from the whole newsroom

Drawbacks:

- A lot of skills spread very thinly
- Very time-consuming
- Less pay-off, training a lot of people to create a few users

**The fellowship/the specialist:** The St. Louis Post-Dispatch plan required reporters to apply for a six-week specialist program. They had to have a story idea, data and be pulled of their beat to work with the CAR editor. Those reporters would then go back to be the CAR coordinator for their team and are part of a larger virtual CAR team for the newsroom.

Benefits:

- Greater pay-off
- Other people serve as mentors for their team
- Skills level is more in-depth

Drawbacks:

- Difficult to get team editors to commit
- Fewer skills throughout the newsroom
- Others may feel left out

## **Outside training**

Some newsrooms have opted to hire outside training companies to do CAR training.

Benefits

- "Prophet in his own land" – outsiders are smarter
- Better commitment from participants
- Someone else is doing the work

Drawbacks

- Cost
- Lack of follow-up
- Specialization to your needs – for example, corporate spreadsheet training won't focus on journalism.

## **CAR Department**

Rather than training the newsroom or specialists, some newsrooms have opted to set up a CAR department that does analysis for others in the newsroom.

#### Benefits

- Efficient – especially if you hire specialists
- Allows for more high-end analysis

#### Drawbacks

- You may create a bottleneck if there are several requests
- You don't develop skills in the rest of the newsroom – particularly among reporters covering beats who might benefit from learning CAR skills.