Exploring new digital tools

Journalism tools abound in the digital age. The challenge is to stay current, since use of the best tools saves time and improves the work.

Try these activities:

Flashlight: Look again at the digital age experiments mentioned by the author: DocumentCloud, Timeline.js, Ushahidi and OpenBlock. Divide students into four groups. Have each group pick a tool, find out what it does and how it works. Does innovation increase the diverse ways people get their news? Does it help citizens become part of news gathering? Students would present their findings to the class.

Spotlight: As a class, examine Public Insight Network, which seeks to "add context, depth, humanity and relevance to news stories." PIN is a large network of citizens who have volunteered their expertise to improve news. Discuss: How would a news organization know if PIN has been effective? What would be different about the stories? Look at the "Partner Notes." Do you think PIN works? In this era of social media, is it still needed?

Searchlight: The Google Summer of Code teaches students 18 or older how to write computer code every year. The University of Moratuwa in Sri Lanka ranks first in the program's award-winning students. Assignment: Find a coder and together look over projects such as Sahara Vesuvius, the Network Analyzer and IMALSE. Can you explain what they do? Are they useful? How?

Extra credit: Where can journalists learn about new digital tools? Check out PBS Media Shift, Nieman Journalism Lab, the Poynter Institute and News University. Is one of them better than the others in identifying new tools? Who points people to the best new tool training?