

EDUCATION A HEDGE AGAINST RECESSION

As Jobs Dry Up, It's Increasingly Important to Keep Skills Up to Date

By Allison J. Waldman
Special to TelevisionWeek

When the going gets tough, the tough find new ways to succeed.

For news professionals facing an economy in recession, with media outlets shrinking their workforce even as they try to expand their reach with the Web, it's up to the individual to find new employment options.

One answer is found in education, in universities as well as at conferences and events. "I wouldn't be teaching without the master's degree," said Dale Willman, an award-winning radio and TV professional who has worked at CBS, NPR and CNN Radio and is now

executive editor of Field Notes Productions. "You have to be aware that academic credentials can

"Academic credentials can open up avenues that weren't available before."

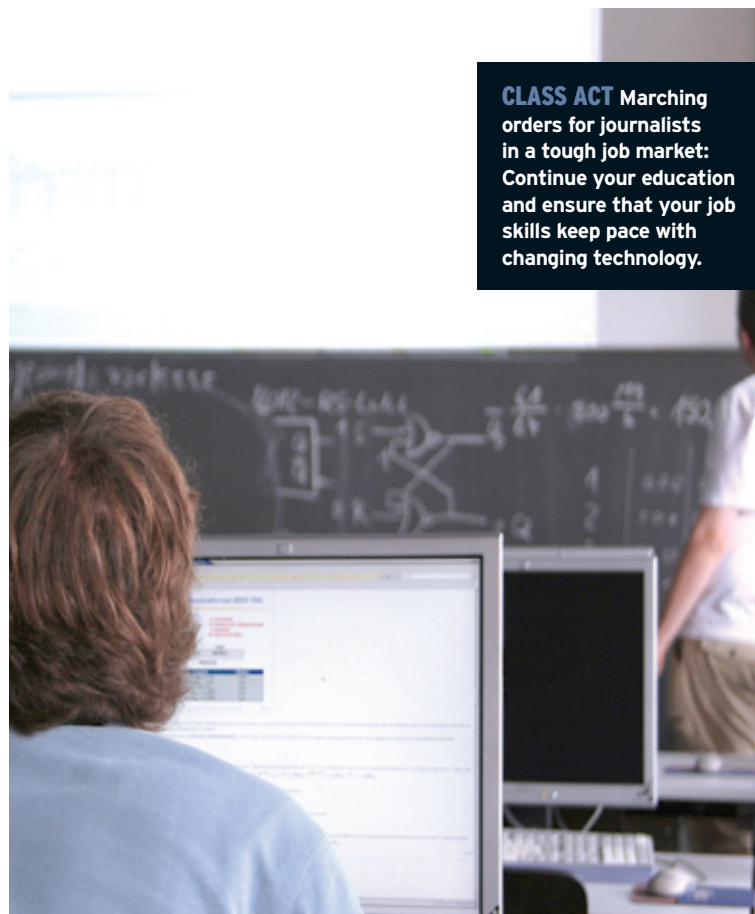
Dale Willman, executive editor, Field Notes Productions

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As an adjunct professor as well as a board member of a number of

journalism organizations, Mr. Willman uses his real-world experience to teach aspiring journalists.

While working for CNN Radio, Mr. Willman detailed the environmental health problems surrounding the Broadway production of Walt Disney's "Beauty and the Beast" in a piece called "Broadway's Dirty Little Secret." Mr. Willman documented the health hazards faced by musicians who underwent a daily onslaught of chemicals from the pyrotechnic explosions that took place during the show. That series earned Mr. Willman a national Edward R. Murrow Award for investigative reporting in 1998, and resonates when he



CLASS ACT Marching orders for journalists in a tough job market: Continue your education and ensure that your job skills keep pace with changing technology.

teaches and appears at conferences and speaking engagements.

Adam Glenn, another award-winning news pro, concurs with Mr. Willman. "I think people will find a lot of opportunities out there, especially with an education background. Museums are all about education, and educational information is essentially similar in many ways to journalism in its need for accuracy and fairness and independence," said Mr. Glenn, who runs iReporter.org and is an independent online consultant with a special focus on citizen journalism.

Mr. Glenn has held posts with a wide variety of news media in New York and Washington, most recently as senior producer at ABCNews.com in New York, where he ran health, science, technology and business coverage. He used that experience to co-found I, Reporter.org, a "citj" (citizen journalist) training business and blog, with Amy Gahrn, longtime blogger and editor of the Poynter Institute's E-Media Tidbits column. Recently, the pair won a prestigious Knight News Challenge Grant to launch a new citizen journalism Web site covering environmental issues in Boulder, Colo.

Heeding his own advice about the importance of education, Mr. Glenn has successfully completed short-term fellowships—10-day sessions—to hone his journalism skills, especially learning more about how to master the Internet. "I haven't seen opportunities in fellowships go away yet. Some media foundations like the Knight Foundation have really in the last couple of years bumped up their commitment to the media world, finding new models for journalism. And even if some of these endowments are weakened, I think those who are committed to this kind of approach, to developing fellowships and so

on, are really looking at it in the long term and see the need," Mr. Glenn said. "Also, some of the organizations that fund these foundations are not going to be affected the same way. For example government institutions, [the National Institutes of Health or the Centers for Disease Control], which put together journalism fellowships that focus on science and health and medical reporting, I don't know that they'll be pulling back necessarily."

Mr. Glenn is speaking from personal experience. "I've brought home notebooks full of thoughts about our profession and citizen journalism," he said.

Focusing his thoughts into three specific rules for journalists, Mr. Glenn's advice is this: 1) train, 2) strain and 3) contain.

"Train" means to make yourself smarter through education, such as online courses, fellowships and classes. "Strain" is his term for pushing yourself harder by stretching beyond your comfort zone; for instance, if your expertise is in one area, get to work on mastering another. This will make you more marketable. Finally, there's "contain," which Mr. Glenn explains means to "keep yourself warier."

"Over time, you've got to build your know-how. You've got to get smart and stay that way. It's part of what makes journalism so fascinating and challenging. So enjoy it, even when the going gets tough," said Mr. Glenn.

Like Mr. Glenn, Mr. Willman encourages media professionals to seek fellowships.

"Fellowships are a huge idea," said Mr. Willman. "They give you skills, but they also give you the credentials bosses like to look at that will help you get better jobs. The University of Michigan has one, there's an environmental one at the University of Colorado at



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ADAM GLENN
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Boulder. There are a number of these types of programs that allow journalists to pause mid-career and have that reflection. I just finished two online courses myself. There are a lot of ways of accessing information. Will it help you get a job? No, but you can say, by taking this fellowship, I've bettered my craft, which in the long term is going to help me with other jobs."

One way to expand a job description and become more valuable to an employer is by developing Web skills, especially blogging. "Most journalists are blogging. Most traditional journalists have to blog as part of their jobs. When I met with a group last summer and asked journalists who were blogging, every hand went up," said Mr. Willman. "They're blogging daily. It hasn't changed what they've done, but it's provided a new outlet for them. Something that might not be right for the news hole would find a place on a blog. Some points may not require a full, in-depth story, but it's still interesting enough to make it on a blog. Blogging has a very big role now for traditional journalists."

Whether or not you're currently in a staff position, a journalist can create his or her own

"Journalism remains a great profession and there are tremendous opportunities ahead."

Adam Glenn, co-founder, iReporter.org

Web site and self-publish. "Nobody can work for nothing, and in effect by self-publishing we're working for nothing," said Mr. Glenn. "But the way I would look at it is that blogging or more sophisticated things you put on the Web are all about branding and letting others know—potential clients, colleagues, other organizations know—the kinds of things that you can do. It's like setting up a show window of your work. It draws people in.

"You don't want to give all of it away, so perhaps you create a project that you believe in and are committed to, so you produce it for your own Web site, self-publish it as a way to show people what it is you're capable of doing as a freelancer or as a consultant, etc.," he added.

"Ultimately, the industry is changing dramatically," he said. "I personally think that journalism remains a great profession and there are tremendous opportunities ahead, so I certainly would hope that most journalists would stay in journalism, but once you make that choice I think that it's really important to allow yourself to rethink what journalism is and do all you can to market yourself and make yourself the best journalist you can be." ■

WTHR

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ment team.

An executive producer is assigned to be the point person for quality control of the entry process itself, which involves reporters, producers, editors and photographers filling out a slew of application forms, making dubs and paying entrant fees for a number of competitions, including the Emmys, Peabodys, Indiana Broadcasters Assn., the National Headliner Awards, the Murrows, the duPonts, AP and the Indiana AP Broadcasters Associa-

tion. Then all of the entries from WTHR are sent together to each awarding entity.

Mr. Tellus will participate in the decisions made on which shows to submit in "best news-cast" categories. "That's something for which we know the successful ingredients, which include writing, pacing and using graphics as storytelling tools," he said. "We will narrow it down to a handful."

The five-person investigative unit enters a number of its reports, and has been amply awarded for its efforts, including a recent Peabody Award for "Prescription Privacy: 13 News

Investigates." The piece grew out of the story of a woman attacked in her home for an OxyContin prescription, and precipitated nationwide change in how pharmacies dispose of patients' personal information.

"We found that pharmacies were throwing away people's names and addresses and other private information in dumpsters open for anybody to discover," Mr. Tellus said. "We went to Miami, Phoenix and Dallas and found the same thing. We asked pharmacies how they could allow this to happen. Now some corrective measures are in place."

One of 2008's most-awarded

pieces for WTHR was the hard-news feature "Mission Complete," the story of young Indiana soldier who lost both legs in Iraq, was treated at Bethesda Naval Hospital and said he didn't want to go home until he was able to walk off the plane.

"We spent weeks in rehab with him there through all his struggles, watching him learn how to walk again and overcome devastating loss," said Mr. Tellus. "We followed him back to Indiana, and as he walked off the plane greeted by family and friends, it was one of the most emotional stories you would ever see. It was something you'll never forget." ■



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