The intervention from the designer’s perspective

The Ozioma news service is a cancer news service for African American newspapers. And what we do is we write news releases and we send them to African American newspapers around the country. It started a few years ago and part of the research was to figure out whether localization of these news releases would increase the likelihood that they would be published. And so in Ozioma One, what we did was we localized the news releases with local data. We had data from various communities or states. And then we localized the news releases and sent them to the newspapers. And what we found was that those stories that were localized — that had local data — were published at a much greater rate than those stories that did not have that information.

So for the next phase of Ozioma, we decided — well, what if we enhanced these stories even more — made them even more local? What if we had local quotes and local photos and local facts in the stories? So, we decided to try that. To do that, we needed people in the local communities who could actually get that information for us. And so what we did was, we partnered with the American Cancer Society and we found people in twelve communities around the country who could really be citizen journalists for us and provide those quotes and the additional local information that we needed. So, we brought them Atlanta — brought them together — and we trained them in how to ask good questions, how to interview, how to write down quotes, the kind of things we were looking for, how to take photographs. And then we sent them to work and we started writing news releases and asking them to provide local people — local quotes — people who could talk to the subjects of those news releases. It could be doctors, it could be cancer patients, it could be families of cancer patients, really anybody who could speak to the subject of our stories.

So, they provide the quotes, and they provide the photographs and the local facts. And then I put them into the stories and we send each story for its own community — with the information for its own community — to the newspapers there. So we’ve been doing that since January 2010. And we’ve sent out 37 news releases so far. And what we found was that the news releases with our enhanced localization — with the quotes and photos — are published at about twice the rate of the stories with just the local data. The twelve communities that we send our enhanced localization to really publish at a much higher rate than the twelve communities that we don’t send them to.

Ozioma Two was a very successful project. But it’s labor intensive. And so, we wanted to figure out a way where journalists or media communications professionals could localize the stories themselves. And so what we did was, we created Ozioma Online which is an online tool that has data — local data — from around the country so that people can put that data into their
stories. We put the data in simple sentences so that journalists can simply click and the sentence with data appears in their stories.

Ozioma One included – we included local data in stories. Ozioma Two included quotes and other things that we could get only in the community. Ozioma Three kind of goes back to the kind of news releases we send out in Ozioma One but it’s a way for a journalist and other people to do it themselves. They don’t need a news service to do it for them.

We sent out 37 news releases. We’re going to continue through at least the end of this year. It’s been so successful that we’re now looking at other research questions that we could ask, because we think we’ve pretty much answered the main research question that we’ve set out to answer at the beginning of the project. So now we’re looking at other things – other features of the stories that might enhance the likelihood that they’ll be published.

In Ozioma Two we are looking at success in a couple of different ways. First, we’re looking at the likelihood that a newspaper will actually publish the story. And so we measured how many times our news releases were published. And we found, as I mentioned that they’re published a lot more if they have enhanced localization with quotes and photos and facts. The second way that we’re looking at success is whether it really makes an impact on readers. You know, in the newspaper business, we always thought if you have a local story – if the more local information in a story – makes more of an impact on readers. But we never really knew that. In this project, we’re actually trying to find that out by talking to readers in these communities – to find out whether they read the stories, whether the health news – the cancer news – has made an impact on them, and whether maybe they’ve changed their lifestyles as a result.

**KEYWORDS:** Description of intervention, Dissemination, D&I strategies, Evaluation, Findings & Impact, Lessons learned, Ozioma, Prior experience

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**The interviewee’s role**

Well, I’m a journalist by training. I worked at the St. Louis *Post Dispatch* for a number of years as a reporter and an editor. And I joined the health communications research lab in 2009 to really work on Ozioma Two and to develop and train new specialists to enhance our news releases. So my role as the editor – I’m the editor of the news service and I write some of the news releases, I edit them all, and I put the local information into them. When we decided to start Ozioma Three, I guess you could call it – Ozioma Online – I’ve been a member of that team in the development stages. I’m kind of the resident journalist here and so they kind of look to me for usability information. I’ve tested it out. I’ve made suggestions on how to improve the program.

There were some challenges in making the transition to academia for me. People who are in research, accuracy is very important to them as it is in journalism. But language that you use in academia is very different from the language you use in newspapers. And being very precise, is very important for academics. It’s not quite as important in newspapers and you don’t really
have the room to be as precise as you might like to be and the readers aren’t probably going to understand it. So I’ve had to kind of translate some of the health information from the academic world into language that people can – normal newspaper readers – can understand.

**KEYWORDS: Barriers and challenges, Interdisciplinary approach, Interviewee’s role on project, Ozioma, Research team**

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**Key factors contributing to the success of Ozioma**

The key to the success of the project, or one key I think has been the news specialist – the people in the twelve communities who have been working with us to provide the information for our stories. And it’s a really a remarkable group of people that we recruited with the help of the American Cancer Society. Some of them – many of them – are cancer survivors. They are really committed to health journalism. Even though they’re not journalists, they really want to help and they really care. And that’s important because we publish news releases, we send them out every two weeks, and we have deadlines, and they have to be met. These folks have done a remarkable job of doing that. And a lot of that is because they care. Some of it also is because they’re being paid and that’s important too. I think that certainly is an additional motivator. I think the training of them was important. It was a short training – just two days – but I went to Atlanta to train them and I think giving them some basics on how to ask questions was very important.

I think having a journalist on the team is very important because a journalist knows what newspapers are looking for. And I can write a story in a way that I think newspapers will find attractive. Somebody who doesn’t know journalism, who hasn’t worked at a newspaper, might not know that.

We really haven’t changed much from the beginning. I think at the end of this year, we may make some changes in order to pursue some other research opportunities. But we’ve been pretty consistent all along in the types of news releases we’ve sent and how that’s done. We have talked to the newspapers and tried to find out when their deadlines are. So we’ve adjusted the times at which we send the stories to better meet the newspaper’s deadlines.

**KEYWORDS: Adaptation, Champion, D&I strategies, Fit, Interdisciplinary approach, Ozioma, Participant selection and recruitment, Research team, Success factors**

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**Barriers and challenges**

We faced several challenges in Ozioma Two. And one of the challenges is dealing with twelve people around the country who are all getting information about the same story but they’re getting different kinds of information in different ways and some of them are better than others. And some of them are better at making deadline than others. So dealing with them all by phone is a challenge but it’s one that we’ve been able to meet pretty successfully. And
photography has been another one. People are—some of the subjects who are being interviewed don’t want to have their pictures taken. And we need to have a photo with every story and it’s tough sometimes to get the news specialists and their subjects to realize we have to have our own photo, and it can’t be the yearbook photo where you look—you know—like a model. It’s got to be a real life photo like you look like today. And so that has been a challenge for us as well. But we’ve been able to overcome that too.

Well at first we simply sent the news releases to the newspapers and—and—waited to see what would happen. But after a while, we found that there were certain newspapers that were not publishing any of our news releases. And so we thought we would try to have the news specialists contact those newspapers directly—the newspapers in their communities. And so we did that and we found that was successful. We tracked how many times they did that so we could compare it to other papers where we didn’t contact them directly. But sometimes all it needs is a change in the secretary at the newspaper. That was our—our—experience in Huntsville. They changed secretaries suddenly. The secretary was getting our news releases, liked them, and passing them along to somebody, and now we’re published almost every time in Huntsville.

I guess I would do the training a little differently. I would focus on some different things in the training. For instance—quotes. I focused in the training on what makes a good quote and how do you get a good quote. I didn’t really define what a quote was. But there are some people—if you’re not a trained journalist, you may not know what is a quote. It’s something somebody says in their own words. And so, that was some training that had to be done kind of on the fly as people turned in just kind of long expulsive paraphrases of what the person told them, but no direct quotes which is what we’re looking for. So I’d make the training a little different. I think that’s one thing I’d do differently.

**KEYWORDS:** Adaptation, Barriers and challenges, Dissemination, D&I strategies, Evaluation, Lessons learned, Logistics, Ozioma