



The organization argues, "If war reporters care about their physical safety, they take a helmet and bullet-proof vest when they venture into the field. Similarly, all journalists should equip themselves with a 'digital survival kit' if they are exchanging sensitive information online or storing it on a computer or mobile phone."

RWB has an online survival kit on its Web site. The survival kit explains how to use Tor or virtual private networks (VPNs) for anonymizing communication, discusses the need to purge metadata from files, and offers advice on securing communication and data on laptops and mobile phones. RWB organizational founders argue,

Journalists and netizens must learn to evaluate the potential surveillance risks and identify the data and communications that need protecting in order to find appropriate solutions, preferably ones that are easy to use. The sophistication of the methods used by censors and intelligence agencies is testing the ingenuity of news providers and the hacktivists who are ready to help them. But the future of freedom of information depends on the outcome of this battle. This is a battle without bombs, prison bars or blank inserts in newspapers, but if care is not taken, the enemies of the truth may sweep the board.

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See Also: Activists and Activism, Digital; Committee to Protect Journalists; Cyber-Vigilantism; Press Freedom and Online/Social Media Security.

Further Readings

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Onion, The

As one of the finest comedic news organizations in the United States, since 1988, *The Onion* has gone from an obscure Wisconsin college newspaper to a far-reaching producer of humorous political content, both online and offline. From 1996 to the present, *The Onion* has charged into the digital world, playing a role in the political process with daily articles and commentaries, e-mail blasts, and starting in 2007, *Onion News Network* (ONN) online video sketches targeted for distribution through social media.

The Onion is perhaps best known for obscuring the lines between political fact and fiction for satirical effect. While typical news headlines might cover 2012 presidential candidate Mitt Romney's wealthy upbringing, *The Onion* posted columns about, for example, "Romney Just Saying He Grew up Poor in Memphis Now." The comedic publisher often creates headlines and material about major and minor subjects. Its original, trivial content is exemplified by its long-running series of what a nameless "Area Man" is up to, such as "Convenience of E-Mail Takes up 30 Percent of Area Man's Work Day." Yet, just as often, *The Onion* puts a humorous twist upon real political events and cultural trends through infamous headlines like "Drugs Win Drug War," "Nation Shudders at Large Block of Uninterrupted Text," or "U.S. Economy Grinds to Halt as Nation Realizes Money Just a Symbolic, Mutually Shared Illusion." The search engine giant Google has also come in for its share of satirical treatment by *Onion* writers, both for its ability to peer into the private lives of Google search users and for its ability to dominate contemporary social media landscapes.

The Onion has remained true to its type of humor over the last 25 years, but its successful use of social media has been part of strategy of convergence and distribution between different platforms. The Webby Award-winning

theOnion.com boasted an average of 7.5 million unique visitors per month from about 40 million page views in 2013. The Web site is dedicated to newspaper content that is, as its producers assert, "delivered constantly, tweeted at optimum times and posted on Facebook during high-traffic periods. Subsequently, users can easily embed, share, or post articles and videos to their personal Facebook and Twitter accounts." There is much collaboration between the site and its fans, who are targeted both for their laughter and ability to spread viral content.

Aside from these goals, two particular developments have fostered *The Onion's* success in social media and politics. One has to do with the timing and nature of its content. After the September 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, most national comedy venues went relatively silent. *The Onion* was one of the first organizations to respond to the events with news headlines like "Hijackers Surprised to Find Selves in Hell." This brazen and fast approach to creating comic news content has propelled the organization into the spotlight amid a 24/7 news cycle.

The other development has to do with the very form of *The Onion's* productions—especially with its creation of the ONN, which copies the televised stylings of networks like CNN. In fact, it might be hard to differentiate the ONN from other traditional news organizations, were it not for slight tweaks in messaging, as in its video report "Poll: Bullshit Is Most Important Issue for 2008 Voters." By parodying bloviating pundits, hyperbolic news graphics, and self-congratulatory titles for media segments like "In the Know," ONN occupies a distinctive place in the political landscape.

While *The Onion's* producers have exploited the Internet's potential to go beyond television's tendency to sanitize or censor much programming, recent trends may call into question how independent the organization will continue to be in developing content free from commercial media pressures. *The Onion's* Web site is replete with advertising and ONN itself recently moved from the Internet to a show on the AMC Network's channel IFC. Overall, however, *The Onion's* discourses show no sign of diminishing in public culture, and if headlines like "Number of Users Who Actually Enjoy Facebook Down To 4" are any

indication, topics like social media will continue to undergo its trenchant, biting critiques.

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See Also: *Colbert Report, The; Daily Show, The; Saturday Night Live.*

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Online Smear Campaigns

The 2008 presidential campaign was characterized by the online smear campaign that claimed that Barack Obama was Muslim. The main source of the smear against Obama was an e-mail chain that spread blogs, video-sharing platforms, and social