

The Young Turks creates an online training program to empower aspiring local digital video journalists

The Young Turks (TYT) is a leading digital-first news publisher based in Los Angeles. It has been publishing continuously since 2002 and covers national news, politics, and sports. TYT believes digital video helps democratize journalism, allowing everyone to tell important news stories.

OPPORTUNITY

Reporting local news and current affairs is critical to a healthy news ecosystem. Recognizing this, The Young Turks wanted to develop a program that could train and empower aspiring journalists around the country at scale, so that thousands of individuals could learn how to create digital-first news content about their local communities.

APPROACH

The Young Turks aimed to create a video journalism training program that was comprehensive enough for participants to gain sufficient knowledge and confidence to become video journalists. TYT put together a team and partnered with experts to help bring the training program to life.

Defining the program: As a first step, TYT gathered a wide range of experts including hosts, producers, and audience development strategists to brainstorm what a program like this might look like. Then, The Young Turks hired a project manager to sort through early findings and put together a program outline, which was later fleshed out by a small team. The team proposed a two-track program, each with eight video units — Track 1 was Journalism and Ethics, and Track 2 was Video Platforms. They named the program TYT Academy.

Building the team: The Young Turks then grew the TYT Academy team by hiring writers and researchers to script the 16 videos, as well as producers, talent, and crew to shoot them.

Developing the program: The team went through an extensive writing, editing, production, and post-production process to ensure all the content was useful and of a high standard. Once finalized, they brought together a focus group of journalism graduates, reporters, and other people interested in video journalism to test the videos. The team made changes based on feedback. After the video series was finalized, TYT created quizzes for each video and a final exam to check for understanding and retention of topics.

Building the technology infrastructure: The Young Turks hired engineers to make the videos and quizzes work together — e.g., ensuring participants received the relevant quiz right after watching the video and passed the quiz before moving to the next video.

Conducting beta testing: Before opening up the program to the general public, the team did a beta test with a select group of candidates. They publicized the program on The Young Turks show and invited viewers to apply. They received over a thousand applicants, shortlisted it down to 50, then ultimately selected 12 to be part of the inaugural class of the TYT Academy. The graduates provided additional feedback on the video series and the team made the last few tweaks to the program.

Launching the program: The program went live to the broader public on June 23, 2020, and is available to anyone who wants to learn best practices of video journalism. The team monitors the activity on TYT Academy and promotes the program strategically so they can maintain a steady flow of new participants, rather than having a huge influx that they cannot properly manage. The Young Turks wanted to make TYT Academy a self-sufficient program, so the team created a social media group for program graduates to offer each other support, guidance, and help.

Looking to the future: The program is ever-evolving, so the team will continuously monitor feedback and develop new content as

needed. They ultimately hope to engage numerous journalism schools and get them to collaborate on the program to make it more comprehensive and up-to-date with the latest laws, trends, and ethical considerations. And as new video platforms emerge TYT will look at adding new content to Track 2.

RESULTS

The Young Turks developed and launched a comprehensive program that teaches the basics of digital video journalism.

- **Created a 16-part video series:** Track 1 has eight videos that teach Journalism and Ethics, and Track 2 has eight videos focused on Video Platforms.
- **Created quizzes and a final exam** to ensure program participants understand the key points.
- **Currently, the program has over 500 individuals** who have completed or are going through it.

LEARNINGS

People want local news: The Young Turks believe there is a bright future for local and community news. Journalism schools want to teach students the nuances of local news coverage, and aspiring journalists are well positioned to cover stories about their local communities.

Creating a video curriculum is a big commitment: TYT found that deciding which topics should be covered, writing out scripts, and finding talent to make the videos took a lot of time and energy. Then, on the technology side, integrating the video series with quizzes and a final exam was far more resource-intensive than they originally anticipated. Despite all the challenges, the team is really proud of their informative and engaging video series, and believe that anyone who is interested in learning about video journalism would benefit greatly from participating in the course.

Create a self-sufficient program: People will always have questions, so find a way to manage these so they don't become overwhelming for your team. TYT set up groups for current and past students to make TYT Academy self-sufficient — students could answer each other's questions most of the time, reducing pressure on the TYT Academy team to constantly be in a customer support role.

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The central thesis of our project is that there are many individuals who are passionate about their local communities, and if they were given knowledge around best practices on how to report on their local communities, they would do so.

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