

AT&T and The Washington Post Team Up to Build the Future of Digital Storytelling



In 2004, Cingular Wireless (now AT&T) sent teams of college journalism students to both the Democratic and Republican political conventions to cover the news – using just their cellphones. We called it the “Wireless Election Connection.”

This was three years before the launch of the smartphone and a year before we launched 3G services. The phones did have cameras, but not QWERTY keyboards. They had 12 buttons requiring old fashioned texting techniques to create copy (e.g. press the “5” key three times to create the letter “L”).



Photos courtesy of The University of South Carolina.

“We were ahead of our time,” said Randy Covington, Director of Newsplex at the University of South Carolina, who oversaw the project. “We got a lot of funny looks from seasoned print and broadcast journalists. But we knew we were laying the foundation for the next generation of news gathering.”

Cut to today, and the smartphone has become essential for newsgathering. Live video can be streamed using powerful devices and networks and high-resolution photos can be snapped and posted in seconds.

That’s why it’s exciting – 15 years later – to see our pioneering work moving to a whole new level. Forget flip phones and texting. This time, we’re going to be testing 5G with one of the premier news gathering organizations in the world – [The Washington Post](#).

AT&T and The Washington Post are working together on the future of digital storytelling. Teams at both companies will experiment with new formats and see what immersive journalism can do better as the world is increasingly connected to 5G.

What could this look like? Think about using virtual or augmented reality to put you in the middle of a congressional hearing or give you a front row seat at a campaign rally. Or perhaps you could see the effects of climate change by taking a virtual tour of a glacier with a digital expert by your side.

These changes won’t come overnight, but the key will be doing this work in a real newsroom – not in a lab. The first step will be reengineering the infrastructure of The Post’s D.C. headquarters with our high-speed network. New 5G devices are expected to be available in the coming months. Then the fun work of creating the future of news gathering will start.