

Interview: Lauren Ashburn, Daily-Download.com

Michael O'Connell, producer, It's All Journalism

Who watches the watchmen? Who guards the gatekeepers?

Today we're talking to Lauren Ashburn, a former television journalist and managing editor at USA Today Live. She is founder and editor-in-chief of the Daily Download [www.daily-download.com], a website that focuses not only on the news, but the way the news industry covers the news.

My name is Michael O'Connell. I'm here with Producer Megan Cloherty and our guest Julie O'Donoghue from Northwestern [University]. And today we're talking to Lauren Ashburn. Hi Lauren.

Lauren Ashburn, editor-in-chief, Daily Download

Hello everybody.

Michael O'Connell, producer, It's All Journalism

How did you launch the Daily Download?

Lauren Ashburn, editor-in-chief, Daily Download

I used to be an executive at *USA Today* and Gannett, running the television division there for *USA Today*, and I felt like there was a void in the marketplace when it came to media and media coverage and media criticism. Plus, there is just this wealth of information out there that isn't curated and there's so many cool tools and so many cool new, social media sites and apps, and so many things that nonprofits are doing that I found it was hard to know what was good, what was bad, what was even out there. So, that's when we went to the Knight Foundation and said, "Hey, how about giving us some cash? And we will put together some videos for you that will air on public television stations across the country, and we'll put a website with it."

Michael O'Connell, producer, It's All Journalism

Would you describe these videos as more news industry focused or sort of news commentary?

Lauren Ashburn, editor-in-chief, Daily Download

We have two types of videos on Daily-Download.com. We have one minute interstitials, which appear on PBS stations across the country. They are basically an analysis or summary of websites or apps or different products. So, we have done things, you know, as basic as Pinterest, when Pinterest popped up and that became more of a mainstream product, to something on the Super PACs, where, during the election, you could find out where all the money was coming from and where all of it was going.

Michael O'Connell, producer, It's All Journalism

Tell me about the Knight Foundation grant. That's a two-year grant?

Lauren Ashburn, editor-in-chief, Daily Download

It's a two-year grant. Eric Newton is a prince and a fabulous person and I will always be indented to him. We went to him. He was, at the time, running the division that handed out the grants and now he's moved on to the executive, C-suite level. But Eric really saw that there was a need. The Knight Foundation, you know, funds tons and tons of these interesting and cool projects and so, he thought, "Well, they don't always get a lot of play. and wouldn't it be great to have a website and a clearing house that would not only address the Knight funded projects" — it wasn't a vanity project for him — "but would talk about the role of social media and give people the opportunity to sample these products and to learn about them whether or not they're 70 or 25?"

Michael O'Connell, producer, It's All Journalism

What insights have you gotten so far about what's going on now in the news industry with social media, what's going on with the shift to digital?

Lauren Ashburn, editor-in-chief, Daily Download

What we found with Daily Download is that there's never a problem writing about new things. There's always a new site. There's always something that mainstream media is trying to do to catchup to Silicon Valley. There's just a lot of information out there. So, we're never at a loss for something to cover, for something to talk about in those videos. But, what we found is that there's also not a lot of media criticism, and we have been able to carve out a niche there. We have about 700,000 uniques and we started six months ago. And so, there's really a niche there for people in the industry, but for people who also follow media. People love to hate journalists and media and so, anytime there's any criticism of it, you know, it really strikes a nerve.

We have found, though, that, well, what I have found personally is while I had this mission, I didn't realize that it would be so much more negative than just writing a story, talking about it and going on TV, as I do, to talk about the things I write about or do. There is this tenor on social media that can be really nasty.

Michael O'Connell, producer, It's All Journalism

Sort of snarkiness.

Lauren Ashburn, editor-in-chief, Daily Download

It's not even snarky. I've had death threats.

Megan Cloherty, producer, It's All Journalism

Oh, my gosh.

Lauren Ashburn, editor-in-chief, Daily Download

I've had people say, I did a media commentary on the *New York Post*, when it ran the front page cover of the man who was hit by the train, the photographer who, the freelance photographer who took the picture just as he was about to be hit, and people said, "Why don't you jump in front of a train." This is all on Twitter. You go to your "@-mention" and you say, "Whoa, OK, a little anger issues there, folks." And so, I have found that it's not just me. When George Bush, H.W., was in the ICU recently battling, I guess he had bronchitis or some sort of illness, coughing, fever and all that, people were saying on Twitter, "I hope he dies a painful death." You're watching that. Most recently, on Fox News, everybody was, a lot of the commenters, a lot of the analysts were saying they didn't believe that Hillary Clinton had fallen and had a concussion and that she actually was faking it and it was "Benghazi flu," because she didn't want to testify.

Michael O'Connell, producer, It's All Journalism

Right. It was all obfuscating that story that somehow she was hiding.

Megan Cloherty, producer, It's All Journalism

That was all over Twitter too.

Lauren Ashburn, editor-in-chief, Daily Download

It was and people were really mean about it. This translated to the air. So, what I'm finding through creating this website and doing these nationally broadcasted videos, is that there's an underbelly to this whole wonderful invention called social media. I mean, I love Facebook. I love Twitter. I love discovering things like Pinterest and learning about D-scuss and learning about all of the different creative tools that mainstream media have to put together in order to stay relevant, in order to reach these audiences that really are getting their news from places like Twitter. I mean, Twitter has become the new AP. I wake up in the morning and check that first. Right to my Twitter feed because I follow cool people who are interested in what I'm interested in and, bam, I know the hot stories of the day already.

What really throws you, though, is when like political reporters start commenting on Kim Kardashian and the fact that she's pregnant.

Michael O'Connell, producer, It's All Journalism

Right.

Lauren Ashburn, editor-in-chief, Daily Download

I'm like, wait, wait, wait, wait ...

Michael O'Connell, producer, It's All Journalism

Where is that wall, then, for a journalist? On the one hand, they encourage people to, "Put your personality in it." That's one of the things about social media is that people react to that. They like getting the information, but they also like to have an insight into the person's attitudes, their thinking, what interests them. And so then, that's all fun and good until somebody says the wrong thing —

Lauren Ashburn, editor-in-chief, Daily Download

Loses an eye.

Michael O'Connell, producer, It's All Journalism

And suddenly 10,000 people are blasting them on Twitter because, "Oh, you dared to say this."

Lauren Ashburn, editor-in-chief, Daily Download

A lot of people have been fired over things they have said on Twitter, and a lot of people have said some really dumb things that should've made them be fired. The older, really powerful men, who have no PR filter, like Jack Welch, who can say that the unemployment numbers were cooked up when they did well right before the election.

Michael O'Connell, producer, It's All Journalism

And it's like, "What does that mean?" Challenge them, you know.

Lauren Ashburn, editor-in-chief, Daily Download

Right. You just wonder how they were able to do that. I mean, he's not running a company now. But Rupert Murdoch said some very nasty things about Jewish-owned press and was really taken to task for it. And I'm sure it's something that they're firing off, you know, right while they're in their bedroom and they're just going, "Oh, I think this is terrible." There's no sort of filter for it. And that's part of the problem with social media, not when it comes to journalists. Journalists can make mistakes. They can say things that maybe have gone a little too far. They can say things that maybe —

Megan Cloherty, producer, It's All Journalism

Are too opinionated?

Lauren Ashburn, editor-in-chief, Daily Download

Are too opinionated. Exactly. But, what I find from just general folks is that the more anonymous you can be, you know, you don't have to put your name out there. You can be "Joe Blow." You can be, you know, "I hate people, @IHatePeople." Nobody has to know who you are. You can really be as vicious as you want to be with no accountability and not consequence.

Michael O'Connell, producer, It's All Journalism

And that's empowering for some people who feel that they have no voice. They create a separate account or even they're own account, you know, "I'm John Smith and I think you're an idiot. I think that you can't do this."

Megan Cloherty, producer, It's All Journalism

Like a sounding board.

Michael O'Connell, producer, It's All Journalism

Sadly, human nature.

Lauren Ashburn, editor-in-chief, Daily Download

That's what I love about social media. Everybody can weigh in. Right? It's not the editors who report to the public. Everybody has a voice and I love that as a believer in the First Amendment, as a journalist. I've been a journalist my whole life. I'm all about that. But it's, as I said, as we got into it at Daily Download you find that, I'm constantly saying this, "Well, Twitter is more snarky." And you can have David Axelrod saying things that he wouldn't normally say on Twitter. He wouldn't make fun of Mitt Romney putting Shamus the dog on the roof of his car and take a picture, you know, with Beau, sitting in presidential limo and tweet that out. You know, saying, "Well, this is how you take care of a dog." I mean, you just don't see that.

Megan Cloherty, producer, It's All Journalism

As far as your users, is it mostly journalists who are interested in where the industry is going and what tools are at their disposal, or is it more people who want to be critical of journalists? What are you finding as far as feedback goes?

Lauren Ashburn, editor-in-chief, Daily Download

Our audience really has turned out to be the "influentials," we like to call them. The people, who, in Washington —

Michael O'Connell, producer, It's All Journalism

The "elites?"

Lauren Ashburn, editor-in-chief, Daily Download

No, not the elites. They don't have money. They have power, social power. Right? So we find that a lot of people in the industry who are at big jobs and, you know, they want to make sure they know what's being said and who's being criticized. And so, that's where a lot of our audience comes from. It comes from New York, Washington and L.A. But, there is a significant part of the middle of the country and regular folks who really hate media and want a weigh in on their mistakes. And that is what has been surprising to me.

Michael O'Connell, producer, It's All Journalism

My own experiences as a journalist, sometimes you get really full of yourself. You feel like, "Oh, I've written this great story" or "I've done this great series. I've done something really important and helpful to the community and everything." But then, sooner or later, you run into somebody who reminds you that journalists, on the scale of things, are maybe just this much more —

Lauren Ashburn, editor-in-chief, Daily Download

Popular than lawyers?

Michael O'Connell, producer, It's All Journalism

Less despised than politicians.

Lauren Ashburn, editor-in-chief, Daily Download

That's right.

Michael O'Connell, producer, It's All Journalism

We can look down our noses at politicians and lawyers, maybe, but ...

Lauren Ashburn, editor-in-chief, Daily Download

No, we're scum of the earth to a lot of people, so those are the people who like to read this. But I also find that people, one of the stories that did really well for us was by one of our columnists, contributors, David Zurawik, who's the *Baltimore Sun* TV critic. And [<http://daily-download.com/chelsea-clinton-nbcs-pretend-journalist/>] he did a piece for us talking about why Chelsea Clinton was a terrible journalist and why she was a "pretend" journalist. And Drudge picked it up, Matt Drudge's site [www.drudgereport.com] picked it up, and it just went on fire because, you know, obviously Drudge picked it up because he has the "right" bent, right wing bent.

Michael O'Connell, producer, It's All Journalism

Really?

Lauren Ashburn, editor-in-chief, Daily Download

Right, "Really? Huh?" So, and it stayed up for the whole weekend and people were just loving that, that somebody was bashing a Clinton. Another piece that did really well for us was the piece that I wrote about how Hillary Clinton was being bashed for, as we talked about earlier, for the Benghazi flu.

[<http://daily-download.com/hillary-haters-mocked-illness-apology/>]

All the left wing sites picked that up, as to say, "Look at these Fox News people." And the right ones pick up, "Look at Chelsea Clinton, she's the daughter of, who does she think she is?" So, that's good for our traffic, actually, because we get it from both sides. But I get called a Republican Shill and I get called —

Michael O'Connell, producer, It's All Journalism

A leftist?

Lauren Ashburn, editor-in-chief, Daily Download

An elitist Democrat, you know, and so, but I feel like that's when we know that we're doing our job. When we're holding the media accountable.

Megan Cloherty, producer, It's All Journalism

I was going to say that's a good thing if it's coming from both sides.

Lauren Ashburn, editor-in-chief, Daily Download

When everybody hates us.

Michael O'Connell, producer, It's All Journalism

When we are hated the most, we are doing our best.

Lauren Ashburn, editor-in-chief, Daily Download

That's right. That's right.

Megan Cloherty, producer, It's All Journalism

Tell us a little bit about your contributors, because you mentioned the *Baltimore Sun* and Howard [Kurtz] as well.

Lauren Ashburn, editor-in-chief, Daily Download

Howie Kurtz, sure, Howard Kurtz, long-time *Washington Post* media critic, started out as a media reporter. He writes for us and does a bang up job. He always has great insights and we're lucky to have him. He has his experience. The thing I like the most about his writing is that he's fair, and we try to be fair. As I said, we do pieces that are on both sides. We're equal opportunity critics and his pieces really bring a depth and a context that nobody else can bring.

Megan Cloherty, producer, It's All Journalism

As far as deadlines go, do you guys have new content every day or, for editorial decision making, do you just go with the news cycle?

Lauren Ashburn, editor-in-chief, Daily Download

No, we have a managing editor named Ben Jacobs, who used to write for *The Daily Beast* [<http://www.thedailybeast.com>], and he outlines our editorial coverage. Yes, sometimes we do it off of the news. Howie and I do these videos every day that are analyzing what is happening in the news. So today we'll do one on the fact that Lance Armstrong is leaking to *The New York Times* that he may be ready to admit to doping and what does that mean? The media has been following this story for years, since the '90s, and were we hoodwinked? And how did we let it get so far that we were, the story was always "Lance is great." What does that look like? Who was criticizing him?

Michael O'Connell, producer, It's All Journalism

Is this sort of a "mea culpa" of the news industry? "Why weren't we more diligent? Why weren't we the people who exposed this 10 years ago, instead of doing it now?"

Lauren Ashburn, editor-in-chief, Daily Download

Right. There is that.

So, the other contributors we have. We really try to do a good job of including students. We have a team of student writers who sometimes get on, sometimes don't, but are always helpful. They do submit some really good posts and then other times they fill in the blanks behind the videos that we do for the PBS stations. So, they'll call up the companies and get the quotes and sort of do the research if we're going to do something on Spotify, they'll call Spotify. They'll do actual interviews and we'll feed that into the story that is written around the video that we have done. So, we feel it's really important, I always feel it's important to give back. I know that my greatest experiences and what brought me to this profession were my internships.

Megan Cloherty, producer, It's All Journalism

And it's good to have that perspective too, from a younger perspective on the news, which obviously, coming from —

Lauren Ashburn, editor-in-chief, Daily Download

What're you saying? I'm old?

Megan Cloherty, producer, It's All Journalism

It's interesting, though, that they might not think about the '90s baseball thing, they were all younger, where Lance Armstrong was this icon figure who has fallen from grace.

Michael O'Connell, producer, It's All Journalism

Everybody was wearing a bracelet that read "Live Strong."

Megan Cloherty, producer, It's All Journalism

Yeah, they might have a different perspective on what that means.

Lauren Ashburn, editor-in-chief, Daily Download

That's very true. They bring a lot to the table about video games.

Megan Cloherty, producer, It's All Journalism

Well, there you go.

Michael O'Connell, producer, It's All Journalism

These kids today.

Julia O'Donoghue, graduate student, Medill School of Journalism, Northwestern University

I have a question. Do you, in terms of, I'll call them "seasoned journalists," who do you think is doing a good job adjusting to social media? Like, the person who I think does a good job, I'm in Chicago right now, Roger Ebert has done a pretty good job. Obviously, he's got other challenges, so maybe this is a good outlet for him.

Lauren Ashburn, editor-in-chief, Daily Download

Right. Not to toot our own horn, but Howard Kurtz was one of the first people who had a blog before anybody knew what a blog was. He has 150,000, I think, Twitter followers. He updates his Twitter. He blogs. He writes long-form stories. He does TV. He has his own TV show. That's as multimedia as you get. Susan Page at *USA Today* is just like that.

Julia O'Donoghue, graduate student, Medill School of Journalism, Northwestern University

Yeah, she does like that.

Lauren Ashburn, editor-in-chief, Daily Download

Susan Page, she hosts *The Diane Rehm Show* [<http://thedianerehmshow.org>] occasionally, she writes, she's the Washington bureau chief for *USA Today*. She tweets. She Facebooks. She is involved in a lot of panel discussions, and she's on TV all the time talking about her point of view and that's really what it takes right now to be a journalist. And if you're in TV or radio, you have to know how to edit. You have to know how to shoot now if you're coming up. Thank God I'm not coming up right now. If I had to shoot, it would be really bad.

Michael O'Connell, producer, It's All Journalism

It's sort of a one-man-band show anymore.

Lauren Ashburn, editor-in-chief, Daily Download

It is. Although, actually, I'm shooting with an iPhone. Sometimes we do our videos with just an iPhone, a tripod and mic that plugs in. Now they have this boom mic that you can actually plug into iPhones. It's just a snap.

Michael O'Connell, producer, It's All Journalism

We did a interview with Neal Augenstein from WTOP and he files all of his reports on an iPhone. [<http://itsalljournalism.com/podcast-10-neal-augenstein-wtop-reporter/>]

Lauren Ashburn, editor-in-chief, Daily Download

In his car.

Michael O'Connell, producer, It's All Journalism

In his car. The mobility aspect of it, you know, is incredible. It has sort of streamlined the way people do things. I want to go back to sort of something you were talking about with social media, because I know there was a lot of talk before the election about how much social media was going to play into it. How much do you think social media played into it?

Lauren Ashburn, editor-in-chief, Daily Download

Howie and I do a segment on *PBS NewsHour* [<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/>], and we do that every other week and it talks about social media and the presidential election. Now, we've been renewed for the next year and we'll be talking about social media and politics. So, I have a great depth of knowledge on how it played in.

What we found is that in 2008, obviously, Barack Obama made presidential elections about social media and reaching his younger base through all of the different outlets. Through Facebook and Twitter. Well, this year, they took their operation and just quadrupled it and with all of the information that they learned from 2008, they put into 2012. And their team was all over social media, including the fact that they would advertise on Xbox. So, if you're on an Xbox video game, an ad would pop up that would say "Vote. Get out the vote." It was a "Get out the vote" campaign. And, always, 10 to 1, it was a 10 to 1 ratio of the number of followers that Barack Obama had to Mitt Romney that the number of blog posts, the number of tweets. Part of it is that Romney wasn't around in 2008, but part of it is too that, you know, Obama sees it as a real galvanizing force. The question always becomes in social media and politics, "Is it effective? Does it get people to the polls?"

Megan Cloherty, producer, It's All Journalism

Does it matter at the end?

Lauren Ashburn, editor-in-chief, Daily Download

Right. And I don't know if that question can ever be answered, but I do know that there are studies that talk about how, if your friends are on Facebook and Twitter and they are representing that they are behind a certain candidate, that you are more likely to take their recommendation of of who you should vote for than you are any other form of communication.

Megan Cloherty, producer, It's All Journalism

Isn't it like that with anything? Like weight loss or TV shows you should watch? I mean, if your friends are saying it, and that's part of the message. That's part of the reason why they want to reach the younger demographic as well, because you're so influenced, right?

Lauren Ashburn, editor-in-chief, Daily Download

It's true. The other problem with this year's presidential election and social media is Mitt Romney is obviously going for an older demographic that didn't grow up, that wasn't a digital native. They've come to the party a little late, and that's not where his people are or were. I just don't think that, from his point of view, it was as an effective spend.

Megan Cloherty, producer, It's All Journalism

Do you think that the message changed? I mean, obviously, like you said, Obama was on Twitter and that was a whole campaign effort on social media in 2008. Did you see a difference in how they were reaching out or how they were communicating over, not just Twitter, social media in general this time around?

Lauren Ashburn, editor-in-chief, Daily Download

It was much more video heavy. In 2008, you had Hillary announcing her candidacy by a video, if you remember. This year, though, it was so much more video driven than it has every been. You have the video of when Barack and Michelle Obama had their anniversary, where she did this anniversary tribute and then that was shot out to everybody. They used the videos in a very personal way. They actually, the Obama campaign, had a Pinterest account. Michelle had eight different verticals where she talked about food and who she —

Megan Cloherty, producer, It's All Journalism

Fashion.

Lauren Ashburn, editor-in-chief, Daily Download

It wasn't quite that in depth. You could tell that that one was more run by the campaign and, to Romney's credit, Ann Romney had one too and that was much more personal.

Megan Cloherty, producer, It's All Journalism

She did a great job, I thought. Connecting.

Lauren Ashburn, editor-in-chief, Daily Download

That was one of the critiques, though, that I had of the campaign was that they waited way too long to get personal. You know, I wanted to know much more about Mitt Romney. He was always on the defensive, defining who he was.

Michael O'Connell, producer, It's All Journalism

And we were talking about snarkiness before, there was a lot of snarkiness the day after the election where there was this sort of perception that Romney was not responding to people on Facebook and Twitter, that, you know, the whole idea behind building a social media thing is that you're establishing a relationship with your followers. I'm sure there were plenty of people in the Republican Party who would've liked him to sort of maintain some type of relationship, maybe if he isn't going to run again, at least he's going to, these are the people who are following you. These are the people who are interested in what you're saying.

Lauren Ashburn, editor-in-chief, Daily Download

Even the Obama campaign, I remember looking into this, that it was mostly a one-way communication between the Obama campaign and their followers. I mean, maybe once they would do something in response to what one of their followers said. It was really just for them what social media is not, but it was a push out. It was, here's the information, get out and vote. Do all of this kind of stuff, although they did do gimmicks, "Have dinner with us."

Michael O'Connell, producer, It's All Journalism

Or the whole Reddit thing. The president of the United States is on Reddit answering questions this afternoon. It's like, Good God.

Lauren Ashburn, editor-in-chief, Daily Download

And then the server goes down. That is an entrepreneur's worst nightmare. I remember one day we had really high, high traffic, and I would go to the site and it would say "Error, html 500." You're like, "Noooooooooooo." We build it and you come and we can't handle it.

Michael O'Connell, producer, It's All Journalism

Oh my God.

Megan Cloherty, producer, It's All Journalism

As far as going back to the website, I found it interesting the navigation bar. Because obviously it's different topics, but it's very different from what you'd see on a normal, traditional news site. Tell us about how you, we have them here: opinion, social media, cool tools, press, politics and women.

Lauren Ashburn, editor-in-chief, Daily Download

Well, women is a big thing for me. I mean, I've always wanted to do that and I interview a lot of women about their role in media, but also their work/life balance, because I think a lot of women across the country would like to hear "How do you do it all? Can you do it all?" I mean, that is one of the biggest stories that ran last year, was a story out of *The Atlantic* by a woman who used to work in State and just couldn't handle it.

[<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/07/why-women-still-cant-have-it-all/309020/>] It wasn't that she couldn't handle it, she just decided, "I'm not going to do this anymore. I'm going to be focusing more time with my children."

That, to me, is a really important part of the journalism discussion that I don't think gets as much attention as it should. So, I've interviewed Betsy Fischer, who's the executive producer of *Meet the Press*, and she has a daughter and just recently got remarried Jonathan Martin at *Politico* about how she does it.

I've talked to Cathy Merrill, who's the publisher of *The Washingtonian*, who has two small children, very cute, by the way, and she talks about her rule for how she goes out at night that they have a three night minimum rule. You don't go over the three nights and then you're home with your kids, because there's a lot of social networking that you have to do in Washington. And so, to me, I think those lessons are very helpful and they're all lessons from female journalists.

I struggled a lot with that issue until I launched my own company, Ashburn Media Company, and then we put out Daily Download. In the beginning, I was working out of my house. I was working out of my house, but it was so fabulous to be able to do that. I mean, I'm really lucky to have that opportunity. I would be there when my kids would get home from school, and they would come in and I would get up and talk about their day.

Hang it up. Get your homework. Do you want something to eat? And then, half-an-hour later, I'd be back at my office on the phone doing stuff and then they would come in and ask for homework questions. It gets a little hairy, but I would try not to block a lot of that time.

Now, I had the flexibility at that time to do it. I wasn't doing as much on air stuff. I wasn't living by sort of other people's schedules, but I always tried to do that. I always tried to put my kids first and I've done that throughout my entire career. I had the opportunity to take a big job right when my son was born, 12 years ago, and I turned it down because I didn't want to be traveling the country with an infant. You always look back at that and say, "Hmm, I wonder what if?"

And I think a lot of women, whether you're a journalist or not, but particularly if you're a journalist with the demanding schedules and the on-call nature of it. You don't know when a Newtown shooting is going to happen and you're going to have to just pick up and go to Massachusetts for a week.

Megan Cloherty, producer, It's All Journalism

You want to do it right. You want to do it well in your career. That means, in journalism, being accessible and being there and being ready to work late hours. But I think it's interesting, you can almost run it parallel with the financial aspect of it. Even though we go to these great journalism schools, they don't teach us how to have that balance, how to manage, "You know, you're not going to make a lot of money." That's just it.

Lauren Ashburn, editor-in-chief, Daily Download

It's true.

Megan Cloherty, producer, It's All Journalism

And if you want to have a family/life balance, this is how you do it. I think that's a huge part of, if you're going to choose a demanding career, there should be that sort of supplemental, "This is how you do it."

Lauren Ashburn, editor-in-chief, Daily Download

That's why this vertical is so important to me, because I remember in journalism school, I went to Columbia in New York, to their graduate school in journalism, and I'll never forget, Steve Isaacs, who was the assistant dean at the time, talking about the high divorce rate in journalism and it was true. You watched marriages just fall apart, because—

Julia O'Donoghue, graduate student, Medill School of Journalism, Northwestern University

It's sad.

Lauren Ashburn, editor-in-chief, Daily Download

It is. And I don't know about another other profession, but I can say from the inside of journalism that it's true because you've got somebody who's known as "Baghdad Bob." I'm making that up. That's actually from a movie. What movie is that from? [Editor's note: *Speechless*, 1994. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0111256/>] Baghdad Bob?

Michael O'Connell, producer, It's All Journalism

Was it *Network News* or *Broadcast News*?

Lauren Ashburn, editor-in-chief, Daily Download

No it wasn't. I'll think of it in a minute, but Baghdad Bob and there was Geena Davis and they were the speechwriters on the campaign and she was going to have ... anyway. He was called Baghdad Bob, which cracked me up because he was all about his career. He'd be like, "I want to marry you, but can you just wait one second. I've got to do this interview." And she'd be like, "Uh, I don't think so Baghdad Bob. You know, I'd kind of like to finish the conversation about our future."

And so, you're right. People don't talk about that kind of stuff enough, and it scared me. I got married in 1993. I graduated from Columbia Journalism School in '93, in May, and I got married in June. Not only did I get my graduate degree, but I was planning a wedding and then I had to move to Washington, which was where my husband worked. And, I couldn't be in New York. I had a job offer in New York, but I couldn't take it and I worked as an overnight writer at WRC for Barbara [Harrison] and Joe [Krebs].

Michael O'Connell, producer, It's All Journalism

Let me ask you this, as a media critic, what does journalism need to do for women both in its coverage, but then also from an industry perspective, for the people who work in journalism?

Lauren Ashburn, editor-in-chief, Daily Download

When I was at Gannett, in the beginning, there were very few female leaders. Now, Gracia Martore is running the company as a woman, and I think that that makes all the difference in the world at companies, the more women who are in the C-suite. You don't see that enough and the reason you don't see it enough is because of what we were talking about before.

Megan Cloherty, producer, It's All Journalism

Compromise.

Lauren Ashburn, editor-in-chief, Daily Download

Because it's so demanding. And if you're a woman who has come up through the ranks, you know, and you have made all of those sacrifices and now there are all these women who want to have it both and want to work at home part-time and don't, they kind of feel like, "Hey, we paid our dues, you have to pay your dues." So it's not going to be until the Marissa Mayers of the world, the new head of Yahoo, who come in, who have a baby

and understands the travails of this and the decisions that have to be made are things going to change. It is really a top down.

Julia O'Donoghue, graduate student, Medill School of Journalism, Northwestern University

Although she got a lot of criticism for, I don't know how this shook out, but when she announced that she was only going to take like two weeks leave after she gave birth, I felt that there was some backlash from women about like, "You need to stand up for us. You need to say you're going to take more time." It's a little bit of people are judging.

Michael O'Connell, producer, It's All Journalism

I think that there's a lose-lose situation, whatever she does, whether she's well, "She's got to be a leader." As a woman, she's got to go in and take back her position. But then on the other hand, I think there's a lot of cultural expectations for women in any business."

Lauren Ashburn, editor-in-chief, Daily Download

And there's still a lot of sexism.

Michael O'Connell, producer, It's All Journalism

Yeah.

Lauren Ashburn, editor-in-chief, Daily Download

Just look at the presidential debates. Candy Crowley was the first moderator in 20 years.

Julia O'Donoghue, graduate student, Medill School of Journalism, Northwestern University

I know.

Lauren Ashburn, editor-in-chief, Daily Download

The first female moderator in 20 years of a presidential election. What? You know, Martha —

Julia O'Donoghue, graduate student, Medill School of Journalism, Northwestern University

Radditz?

Lauren Ashburn, editor-in-chief, Daily Download

Yeah, did the vice-presidential one. It wasn't the presidential one. There's a lot of that. You think that women are on an equal footing, but they're really not. And I hope to see it in my lifetime that there really isn't a difference in female and male journalists.

Megan Cloherty, producer, It's All Journalism

As far as Daily Download goes, do you guys have future plans or any changes or any exciting projects coming up for the next year?

Lauren Ashburn, editor-in-chief, Daily Download

We do. We're launching a series of live events, which we're very excited about, starting with the inauguration, and we're doing a panel with this one. We're combined with Purple Nation, which is the group that Lanny Davis, former Clinton administration official and Michael Steele, former RNC [Republican National Committee] chairman have put together for bipartisan solutions around politics, hence "purple." Red and blue, hence purple. And so, that's a perfect group fit for us, because we really would like to be seen as, as we talked about earlier in this podcast, we'd like to be seen as an equal opportunity critics for both sides of the aisle. If somebody does something stupid as a Republican or somebody says something as a Democrat, we're there. And so, that's what's really we're excited about that.

Our traffic has just been a hockey stick, going up and up and up and, I mean, there are days that, I don't know if you guys know Google Analytics, but as a Web person, you know, my finger gets tired because I keep hitting them. "Refresh. Refresh. OK, let's see it." As a story sort of takes off.

Julia O'Donoghue, graduate student, Medill School of Journalism, Northwestern University

It's exciting.

Lauren Ashburn, editor-in-chief, Daily Download

It's so exciting, but at the same time it's really hard because you're really out there alone. I have the grant money, which is, I just bow down to the Knight Foundation and Eric Newton for getting us launched, because I can't imagine starting something without having grant money. And a lot of people do it. They borrow, right? We haven't had to do that yet, but we're looking to raise some angel money and to move forward to expand it into even a bigger footprint.

Megan Cloherty, producer, It's All Journalism

We ask everyone this question. It's kind of a big question, so you can decide how you want to answer it. How do you feel about the future of journalism as far as how legacy companies are taking on this new role of social or how things are sort of adapting on television or through politics or however you want to answer it? How do you feel about the way the industry is headed?

Lauren Ashburn, editor-in-chief, Daily Download

We're screwed.

Michael O'Connell, producer, It's All Journalism

Really?

Lauren Ashburn, editor-in-chief, Daily Download

I think so. I mean from a financial point of view. There will always be this insatiable hunger for news. No question about it. Who's going to pay for it? I don't know.

Michael O'Connell, producer, It's All Journalism

Everybody wants it, but they don't want to pay for it.

Lauren Ashburn, editor-in-chief, Daily Download

They want it for free, and that was one of biggest mistakes, I think, that major companies made at the beginning of this, is making things for free and never getting to some sort of pay model.

Take Andrew Sullivan, who writes *The Dish*. You can go to www.AndrewSullivan.com. He was affiliated with *The Atlantic* for awhile. He was affiliated with *Time*. Then he was affiliated with *The Daily Beast*, where I'm a contributor. Now he's striking out on his own. He made a plea to everybody. It's not going to be a paywall. It's a subscription model where he said, "For \$19.99, we will work our asses off for you." And, for \$19.99 a year, and "We will give you all the same great content and we're trying to do this without advertising." And, my hat really goes off to him. And he raised \$100,000 in the first day that he said that. Now, he has a team of six people, \$100,000 is going to get you through the next month, right? And that's going to be a big struggle for him.

But, you also look at major corporations, print corporations, traditional print organizations like *USA Today* and *The Washington Post*. Those big ads that you see in *The Washington Post* go for hundreds of thousands of dollars or in *USA Today*. But, that is shrinking market. Everybody's online and in order to get \$100,000 from a digital campaign? Oh my gosh, it's going to have to last you two months. It's just not the same.

When I say jokingly that we're screwed, I think that somebody has got to figure out how to get the money. Somebody has to figure out how to get the money to pay for journalism, especially investigative journalism, because that's the thing that has been hit. People are closing foreign bureaus left and right. It's just not tenable anymore to keep people there.

Even organizations who are local, city organizations, are shutting down bureaus in small towns. Remember the Trevon Martin case? Nobody even knew about the Trevon Martin case in Florida. The newspaper didn't for a week because they had shut down the bureau in that town and it just came across into the desk as another murder.

Michael O'Connell, producer, It's All Journalism

We've been speaking to Lauren Ashburn of the Daily Download. We're going to sort of wrap up here. Thanks for coming in. Is there anything that you wanted to talk about or that you wanted to say before —

Lauren Ashburn, editor-in-chief, Daily Download

Go to the Daily-hyphen-Download-dot-com. That's another thing. We have to have a hyphen in there because I couldn't afford the \$50,000 to get Daily-Download-dot-com. So, don't forget the hyphen.

Michael O'Connell, producer, It's All Journalism

Somebody's figured out that pay model.

Megan Cloherty, producer, It's All Journalism

And on Twitter, we can find you at?

Lauren Ashburn, editor-in-chief, Daily Download

@LaurenAshburn or @DailyDLoad, because @DailyDownload was taken and, you know what? It was taken by a spambot and Twitter would not give it up because it had high traffic, anyway, the trials and tribulations of a media entrepreneur.

Megan Cloherty, producer, It's All Journalism

Thank you for joining us.

Lauren Ashburn, editor-in-chief, Daily Download

Thank you for having me.