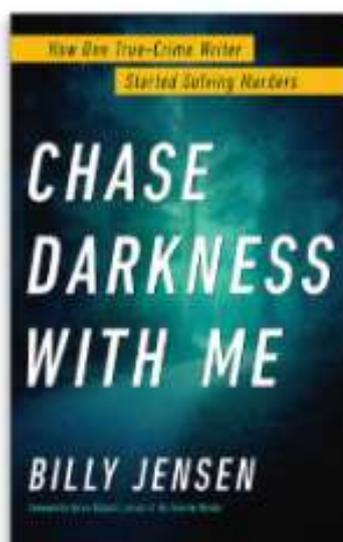


Reading Comprehension – ‘Citizen Sleuths’



Billy Jensen born in 1969

American true crime journalist focused on unsolved murders and missing persons. But after 17 years of writing hundreds of stories with no endings, he was fed up and decided to try and solve the murders himself using radical social media techniques. And it worked. Billy has solved or helped solve ten homicides.



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The post needed to stand out and away from the same tired “Information Wanted” posters law enforcement has been distributing – and the media have been echoing – ever since they were searching for John Wilkes Booth in 1865. Always fact-heavy, leading with heights and weights and age ranges, the bulletproof native language of cops. “Just the facts” was not going to be effective. I needed to tell a story. I selected eleven screenshots from the video – all different angles of the Man in the Green Hoodie. And then I wrote the post in the killer’s voice, speaking directly to the reader.

“This is the video where I punch a stranger – a stranger who later dies. It was taken 4:20 a.m. on Sunday, Feb.7 outside the 7-Eleven on State and Hubbard in River North, Chicago. I am the man in the green hooded jacket and white sneakers. (The man who died is in the blue shirt. He just went to the store for some chips.) If you know my name or anything about me – anything at all – please message me here or leave a comment. If you don’t have any information, but have friends in Chicago, please share. His family desperately wants answers.”

The next part of the plan would be geotargeting – identifying the location where I wanted to share the photo of the suspect and delivering content directly targeted to the people in that location. Even if I had a million fans on my own personal page, I would never get the video in front of the people I needed to reach: the people from that neighborhood. The right people. That meant I had to break out my credit card. [...]

I was asked by Facebook if I wanted to “boost” the post. [...] Depending on how much I spent, I could target a certain number of people based on a certain set of characteristics. Under the audience section, I entered the location of the incident – 418 North State Street in Chicago – and drew a circle around it encompassing a two-mile radius. I kept the age range the boosted post would reach at eighteen to sixty-five plus. [...] For the budget, I entered \$100, a number I would soon realize was paltry. With a hundred bucks, I would reach 4,400 to 12,000 out of the 240,000 Facebook users who lived or worked in the area. If I added more money, I could reach more people. This is how Facebook has become a \$328 billion company.

With the photo, caption, and geotargeting parameters set, I pushed “publish”.





How to be safe in New York City

Crime App *Citizen* draws 1 million New Yorkers and some controversy.

5 Citizen uses a mix of humans and technology to monitor police scanners¹ and sends out alerts to users regarding incidents occurring within about a one-mile radius of their smartphones. Users on site can upload photos and live videos of the scene. Originally called *Vigilante*, the app was banned from Apple's App Store the day after launching in 2016 amid concern it would encourage citizens to take crimestopping into their own hands.

10 But after rebranding as *Citizen* in 2017 with an emphasis on safety and awareness, the app has exploded in popularity. It's currently available in five cities: Los Angeles, Baltimore, Philadelphia, San Francisco and New York, where more than 1 million people have downloaded it. [...]

But where some people feel empowered by knowing everything that's going on around them, others see cause for neurosis and a risk for unfair profiling of neighbors.

20 New York City councilmember Justin Brannan first became aware of *Citizen* about a year ago. He

downloaded the app and quickly became concerned about the "frenetic pace" of postings. "You're in this constant state of anxiety because of what you're seeing on the *Citizen* app, even though there's no real credibility about the posts," Brannan said.

Citizen automatically transcribes 911 calls but doesn't give context on which ones are false alarms or unfounded alerts, he said. This means that if someone sets off fireworks and a neighbor calls 911 reporting gun fire, *Citizen* would publish that shots had been fired and never go back to retract the post or update it.

35 "That puts a certain vibe out there with people that they've got to be fearful for no reason," Brannan said.

Olivia Carville, Bloomberg.com, 2019

1. a police scanner is a device that allows the user to listen to police radio.

React

5. Use the information you have compiled to formulate your opinion: *Citizen*, a good idea or a dangerous concept?

▶ **There, their et they're** > p. 134



Now watch, read and take notes

BL **Reading** Go to **Worksheet (2)** for help.

2. Present the app (what it is, how it works).
3. Find its advantages and drawbacks as presented in the document.
4. Identify the outlook of the document (positive, negative, ambivalent...).

Action!

Write a review

Leave a consumer review for *Citizen* in the app store of your choice.