

Digital Media Workers Organize: A Timeline



At a moment of tremendous flux in journalism, unions are trending in digital newsrooms. In June 2015, Gawker's unionization kicked off a wave of digital media organizing. Ongoing efforts to unionize aim to improve working conditions in a growing sector of the media economy, and workers have won better pay, job security, and benefits. But union drives have also had broader aims: to support editorial freedom in an age of sponsored content, to protect and expand racial and gender diversity, and to give workers a stronger voice in their newsrooms. This timeline highlights some key moments in ongoing efforts to organize digital media.

SUMMER 1999
Times Company Digital

UNION: Newspaper Guild of New York

The Newspaper Guild, now The NewsGuild of New York, announces on December 13, 1999 that it won the first labour contract for a “stand-alone on-line news organization” in the US.

MAY 26, 2005
AOL UK

UNION: National Union of Journalists

After a two-year campaign, the NUJ wins recognition at AOL UK, the first time the union organized a “standalone new media company.”

AUGUST 27, 2009
Truthout

UNION: The NewsGuild-Communication Workers of America

Truthout staff join the NewsGuild after an organizing campaign conducted entirely online.
First contract: August 2010.

JANUARY 27, 2011
The Daily Beast

UNION: Newspaper Guild of New York

Thanks to a merger, Daily Beast staff become part of a union, accessing better pay and seniority recognition. First standalone contract: March 2014.

SPRING 2015
Canoe.ca

UNION: Unifor Local 87-M

In June 2016, one year after unionizing, Canoe.ca’s 15 staffers ratify their first contract as the first “standalone online news site” to be unionized in Canada.

JUNE 3, 2015
Gawker Media

UNION: Writers Guild of America, East

Staff vote 75% in favour of a union after an unusually public, intensely debated union drive.
First contract: March 1, 2016.

JULY 2, 2015
Salon

UNION: Writers Guild of America, East

Editorial staff vote unanimously for union representation, citing Gawker's unionization as inspiration.
Management recognizes the union in August 2015.

JULY 29, 2015
The Guardian US

UNION: The NewsGuild-Communication Workers of America

Staff vote unanimously to unionize and management voluntarily recognizes the union.

AUGUST 7, 2015
VICE US (writers only)

UNION: Writers Guild of America, East

The union, voluntarily recognized by CEO Shane Smith, secures a 24% wage increase over three years, improved benefits, and protections for editorial independence.
First contract: April 21, 2016.

SEPTEMBER 24, 2015
ThinkProgress

UNION: Writers Guild of America, East

On top of a significant pay boost and a \$45,000 minimum salary, WGAE negotiates for 1% of ThinkProgress' ad revenue to be shared evenly among bargaining unit members.
First contract: July 25, 2016.

OCTOBER 6, 2015
Al Jazeera America

UNION: The NewsGuild of New York

Staff vote to unionize after management refuses to voluntarily recognize the union.
Staff organized to address management inconsistencies and lack of transparency.

JANUARY 14, 2016
Huffington Post US

UNION: Writers Guild of America, East

HuffPost US becomes the largest digital newsroom to unionize. The collective agreement includes a 3% raise, benefits, and prevents editorial staff from producing advertorial.
First contract: January 30, 2017.

MARCH 2016
VICE UK

UNION: National Union of Journalists

Despite the ratification of VICE US staffers' first contract days earlier, management blocks VICE UK staffers' efforts to unionize. Management offers to establish an "internal staff council" instead.

JUNE 2016
VICE Canada

UNION: Canadian Media Guild

After a months-long union drive, editorial staff at VICE Canada vote overwhelmingly to unionize, citing low pay, lack of transparency, and editorial integrity as motivation.
First contract: May 1, 2017.

AUGUST 24, 2016
Law360

UNION: NewsGuild of New York

Law360's staff vote 92% for a union despite management's anti-union efforts, including hiring a "union avoidance consulting firm" and firing Law360's editor-in-chief and managing editor days before the vote.

OCTOBER 19, 2016

Jacobin

UNION: NewsGuild of New York

Calling unionizing a “natural extension of the principles that guide their work,” the socialist magazine’s seven staff vote unanimously to join the NewsGuild.

OCTOBER 26, 2016

The Root

UNION: Writers Guild of America, East

The Root’s staff unanimously ask for union recognition to become the seventh digital media organization to join the WGAE.

NOVEMBER 11, 2016

Fusion.net

UNION: Writers Guild of America, East

Overcoming management opposition, youth news site Fusion becomes the first of Univision’s original properties to unionize. “It’s time we practice what we preach,” wrote organizers.

NOVEMBER 25, 2016

BuzzFeed UK

UNION: National Union of Journalists

The NUJ sends a letter to BuzzFeed UK’s editor-in-chief requesting union recognition after 80 editorial staffers in London sign cards. CEO Jonah Peretti emails staff to deter unionization.

FEBRUARY 3, 2017

MTV News

UNION: Writers Guild of America, East

Fifty staffers, including reporters, producers, and social media workers, sign cards, citing a lack of benefits, an unclear editorial chain of command, and insufficient legal protections as motivation.

MARCH 16, 2017

Slate

UNION: Writers Guild of America, East

90% of Slate editorial staffers sign union cards, motivated by increasing diversity in the newsroom, compensation, and protections. As organizing discussions are underway, five employees – including two instrumental to the union drive – are laid off.

MARCH 22, 2017

Thrillist

UNION: Writers Guild of America, East

Thrillist launches an online ballot to tally votes for union recognition from its 65 staffers but management voluntarily recognizes the union.

APRIL 6, 2017

The Intercept

UNION: Writers Guild of America, East

The Intercept's 32-person newsroom joins the WGAE, citing attacks on journalists and the First Amendment by the US government as reasons to organize.

APRIL 12, 2017

DNAinfo New York

UNION: Writers Guild of America, East

25 staffers at DNAinfo, which owns Gothamist, sign union cards but face hostility from management.

APRIL 18, 2017

The American Prospect

UNION: Washington-Baltimore News Guild

The pro-labour, progressive magazine unionizes, citing threats from Donald Trump, stating it's "more important than ever to live out [our] ideals, especially in our work."

JUNE 21, 2017
Raw Story

UNION: Washington-Baltimore News Guild

Raw Story's seven staffers formally request voluntary union recognition to advocate for their rights and to practice the "values of fairness and equality" the publication supports.

SEPTEMBER 13, 2017
StoryCorps

UNION: Communications Workers of America Local 1180

Despite management's anti-union campaign, staff at non-profit StoryCorps vote to unionize, forming a 24-person bargaining unit. Staff want better wages, health benefits, pay transparency, and improved working conditions.

SEPTEMBER 21, 2017
VICE US

UNION: Writers Guild of America, East and Motion Picture Editors Guild

More than 400 content creators and post-production staff vote to unionize with the WGAE and MPEG. "These craftspeople on the cutting edge of our industry have made clear that the future of work in this business is one in which traditional union values of mutual aid and solidarity remain vital," said the MPEG president.

NOVEMBER 2, 2017
DNAinfo and Gothamist

UNION: Writers Guild of America, East

A week after DNAinfo and Gothamist staff vote 25-2 to join the WGAE, billionaire owner Joe Ricketts shuts the sites, leaving 115 jobless. A company spokesperson calls unionizing "simply another competitive obstacle." Days later, 300 people gather to support journalists at a protest, where WGAE's Lowell Peterson rallies the crowd: "We come not to mourn, but to organize."

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