By Chris Vallillo © 2020 Gin Ridge Music

Live steaming is a new and exciting way to stay connected with your audience and expand your base while at the same time, serving an important social need. The Humanities have a tremendously important role to play in these times and live streaming is one way we can still do that, particularly as we deal with this unprecedented period of sheltering in place.

Now this can be intimidating to a lot of us, but like everything else, it can be learned and managed. I've been delving into this head first since, quite literally, March 9th when the Governor first declared restrictions and what I hope to do today is share some of what I've learned with you and give you a path forward you can follow to create your own live stream presentations. I really do believe that those of us that master this new format will stand a much better chance of coming out of this situation intact and in the process, will be doing a valuable service to our audiences.

You can think of this as a punch list of steps to create and post your own live streamed content.

1) **Determine a date, time and content for a live stream performance.** One of my more recent streamed events was a Road Scholar's presentation I already had booked, but had to cancel due to the shelter in place order. The presenter, the Byron Public Library, asked me to consider doing the performance as a live stream. Since I was already doing these, I jumped at the chance to continue work in some capacity and the IHC immediately agreed to support this. We chose to present the live stream on the same date and time we had booked the Road Scholar's program. 1:30 pm, Wednesday the 22nd of April.

2) **Choose a platform, Facebook, You Tube, Twitch, etc.** I currently use Facebook due it's universal nature, but I've heard that You Tube has better quality and I will be exploring posting on You Tube and SHARING it with Facebook or vice versa depending on the complexity. At this moment in time, however, I believe it's more important just to be in the game than anything else. Things are changing at an astonishing rate right now, literally day to day.

3) **Choose your video device. Three basic options.**

    a) **Digital video camera, run through a video capture device and an external audio source, such as a USB Mic (Details below)**: Hardest, most complicated, but best quality. The "video capture device" is a hardware device that connects your camera and the computer and a software program such as **OBS** (Open Broadcaster System) to facilitate the connection. For a video capture device, I use a **Blackmagic Design UltraStudi Mini Recorder - Thunderbolt**. These currently cost about $220.00. More on this below and a Picture of this in the tutorial PDF.

    b) **Computer camera and mic**: Less complicated, Quality depends on your computer and OS (Operating System). Newer equipment can be good. You can also incorporate software like OBS to increase the video and audio quality.

    c) **Smart Phone:** Can be easy to do, but harder to promote with less control over your picture and sound. The best smart phones (I-phone 11 Pro) can provide very good quality, but you cannot pre-schedule a stream. You will also need a phone stand/holder

to get a stable shot. No external software is needed.

Once you've decided which device you'll be streaming from, take some time and get to know how it all works. I had a 2 day time crunch to get up my first stream which in retrospect, was way to short a time to affectively work out the details. What I did was create a series of free shows as fund raisers for a couple groups to learn the process.

4) **Partner with appropriate groups, institutions etc.** Since I do a lot of historical and humanities based presentations, I've partnered with the Looking For Lincoln Heritage Coalition, Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area, and the Illinois Humanities Council on presentations so far. These groups have extensive followers that can they can multiply your audience exponentially and expose you to a wide new range of viewers. Decide if you want them to co-host the show on their Facebook page or just share the link. I've done it both ways. One of my earliest live streams was a benefit concert for a local NFP who was delivering food to folks who were underserved or shut in during the early days of the virus. By co-hosting we reached a much wider audience than when I hosted live streams alone. My current thinking is if the relationship and content connection is strong, such as a Road Scholar presentation, then yes, co-host, but keep it limited to one or 2 more at most. Mutually decide details like how long the post will remain up ahead of time. More on that below.

5) **Getting a live stream audience is all about promotion**. Announce your event as soon as you have the date secured, but at least 2 weeks out. Then use this time to coordinate promotion with co-hosts if you have them and to create a series of social media posts and email blasts ahead of show time to create a buzz around your stream. Things happen faster in the live streaming world, but it still takes time to coordinate everything with any co-hosts, get details right, get the word out and deal with potential tech issues. You can create an **Event** to promote your stream on Facebook. **An Event Post:** (example here: https://www.facebook.com/events/1062251187526749/) is a Facebook invitation you can create prior to scheduling the event to get the word out. You can share these links via, email, social media, friend reposts etc. and in an email blast to your personal or professional email list. Your co-hosts should also share this on their various social media platforms and email blasts. **Be sure to ask folks to shares the post in the Event description** to promote things even farther. In some cases you can also use standard press releases or article re-posts. I got a nice newspaper article from an email blast I did recently for a live stream. When I reposted it to my Facebook page, I got a significantly larger response to the streamed show, including folks I would not have reached otherwise!

6) **By one week out, you should have all your ducks in a row**; your partners, your graphics, your tech etc. Now you can schedule your live stream date and time on Facebook. You do this by clicking on the "live" button of your Facebook site and following the instructions in the attached tutorial. This will create a **Live Stream Post** which will connect folks to your live feed. This will auto post to your Facebook site and to your co-hosts Facebook site**.** This post will turn into your live stream at the time and date you select. The Live Stream Post should include an appropriate graphic with time, date and a short description of the program or performance. You can create a simple version directly in Facebook, or you can create a more complicated version with text through a graphic program such as Canva. It should also include a "Please share" sentence asking folks to share it with their friends. You can

see details of how to do this and an example in the attached tutorial. Here are examples of what they look like:

Live Stream Post: https://www.facebook.com/chrisvallillo/posts/4308699682488996
This is the actual place where the video will occur once you go live.

I use the same graphic for both the Event Post and the Live Stream posts for continuity. You can share these links via, email, social media, friend reposts etc.and in an email blast to your personal or professional email list. Your co-hosts should also share this on their various social media platforms and email blasts.

7) **Now back to video. 3rd party software can increase the quality of your streaming** if you are using a computer camera, and <u>must</u> be used if you are using an external video device such as a video camera. I use **OBS (Open Broadcaster Software)**. This is a free ware that is one of the industry standards. Download the free version at: **https://obsproject.com** and follow the instructions to open and install. If you are using OBS, you will need to copy and enter a **Stream Key:** This connects OBS to Facebook can be found on the LIVE section of Facebook, see the attached tutorial for details. Here is an example of what the stream key looks like:

<u>Stream Key:</u> 4308688095823488?
s_bl=1&s_sc=4309069639118667&s_sw=0&s_vt=api-s&a=AbyOjUdWbbUVR2Fd

You will need to enter this into the OBS program in the stream section. Details are shown in the tutorial. If you are not using OBS or a similar software, then you do not need the stream key. The Event Post will turn into as the stream post when you go live.

8) **Donations button: to use or not…** I don't add a donation button for a paid stream (a Road Scholars program, a show for a fee or a ticketed event) but do use them on shows I play for tips or benefit performances. For a Road Scholar presentation, I feel it's NOT appropriate to include a donation button. On shows where I have used a donation button or tip link, I have had mixed results. Location of the link is always an issue and I frequently hear from folks who say they can't find it. I have heard that You Tube is better for monetization, but everything is changing extremely quickly right now. I've actually had fans send me money directly when the link failed on one show!   Be aware, that **the donation button does NOT transfer when the event is shared** (watching parties etc). If you are using one, you need to have the administrator of each Facebook site that streams the show add in the donation link. I link mine to pay pal, but there are other platforms out there as well. Be sure to keep it simple!

9) **Get your tech ducks in a row! This is all about your streaming capabilities.** That's measured as Megabytes per second (MBS) and the critical measurement is the upload speed. Hoard your megabytes!!!! It's absolutely essential to have a strong, stable internet connection. Get everyone else off the internet in your home when you stream, disconnect smart appliances like Alexa and shut off your cell phones. If you are using Wi-Fi to connect, be as close to the router as possible. Test your internet speeds by running a speed test on your computer. Google "speed test" to find multiple options and run several different versions to get a good view of your actual speed. **Be sure to do it at the same time of day you planning on doing your live streaming**. You need a MINIMUM of **5MBS upload** but

really 10+ MBS to have an effective stream. Faster speeds and better connections mean less "freeze up" and drop outs. Also, be aware of the dreaded "Witching Hours" (between 3-7:00 PM) when internet use is at it's maximum. This is currently changing as online teaching and shelter in place rules are changing internet use patterns maxing out available stream space.

10) **Consider using an ethernet connection**. This is a hard wired connection from your computer into your router through an ethernet cable. Connectivity and upload/download rates are always lower through wi-fi connections which are subject to a wide range of interference issues. These days the internet is overloaded like never before and providers are all struggling and overusing the available capabilities. Low stream rates cause drop outs and frame freezes which are a major problem for live streaming. My earliest live streams were plagued by these issues. I had to upgrade my service from a plan which offered 200 MBS to 300 MBS downloads to get a safe level and even then, I needed to hard wire into the router to even come anywhere close to the advertised download and upload rates (and remember, it's the upload speed that matters here). I am currently using a 100 ft Cat6 grade ethernet cable (about $45.00) to connect my computer to my router which is 2 stories below. It made a HUGE difference! Cat6 grade cable has better shielding (less interference) and will stay current for a longer time that Cat5 as thing change. Pay a bit more for better quality ends. Here's what I got: https://www.sweetwater.com/store/detail/CblCAT6-100--digital-audio-labs-cbl-cat6-100. Surprisingly enough, Cat6 cable is currently cheaper than Cat5 cable right now. You can run up to 100 meters (328 ft) of Cat6 cable without signal loss or degradation. Get good quality cable with higher grade connectors and don't scrimp here!

11) **Good audio is absolutely critical to a successful live stream!** Your audience will put up with poor video, but you will loose them immediately if the sound isn't good. Remember, the internet is FULL of free content right now. Don't give your audience a chance to look elsewhere! A newer computer may have an adequate on board mic, particularly for speaking, but for a musical presentation, consider a USB Mic. This is a mic that connects directly to your computer. I use a BLUE Yeti Pro, $260 at Sweetwater right now. There is also a lower quality one, still very good mic, called simply the Yeti for $149.00. Both are excellent investments and will provide outstanding sound. They connect through any standard USB port on your computer and provide significantly better audio than a computer mic. Be aware that the audio almost always remains on when the video drops so act accordingly (I found out the hard way on that one).

12) **Video.** If you are using an external digital camera, be sure to have it plugged into an AC source. Don't count on batteries to last through a stream. That's a problem waiting to happen. Also, do not record to that device while you are streaming. OBS can record directly to your computer and Facebook records your event as well. In my first live stream, the memory card filled up several times and we had to stop and erase it to continue. As mentioned above, the mic remained on throughout that process.

13) **Do a test live broadcast ahead of time.** Keep it short, say 5 minutes or so, but do a sample of whatever you plan on presenting. Record it and carefully revue the results for audio balance, visual impact, etc. Listen closely to the audio for levels, and sound qualities. If the sound is boomy or hollow sounding, try hanging a few strategically placed blankets or packing mats to dampen down the room echo. Balancing sound with a single mic can be tricky and it's easier to get good sound with a speaking presentation then with a musical

performance. With musicians, if you are using a separate mic, use the "old time radio style" set up with the mic about 4-5 ft away roughly just below head height. The idea is to have a mix where the instrument is well heard, but does not dominate the vocals or speaking volume. Adjust the mic position up for more voice, or down for more instrument to increase or decrease the instrument/voice balance. A separate USB mic is very good for this. Also be aware that there will be a 15-20 second lag between your live performance and the stream on Facebook. This can be confusing if you are trying to monitor the live feed as you perform.

14) **Set your stage visually:** Keep the background uncluttered and as neutral if possible but interesting. Be sure to light from the front to highlight the performer and avoid lighting that comes from behind such as windows. It's distracting and makes it hard to see the speaker or performer. I actually covered my studio windows up with pieces of foam insulation board kill the backlight. Again, check all this during your test stream and adjust accordingly. It will appear different in the camera than in the room!

As a multi-instrumental musician, I tend to frame the shot wider to include the instruments in the picture. This is largely a matter of taste. A sitting speaker will look better in a tighter shot, while someone standing and moving would probably do better with a wider view. Plan this out ahead of time and check this closely in your pre show test.

15) **Performing or presenting to a camera is radically different** than performing to an audience. There will be NO immediate feedback through audience response and simple acts like switching instruments will not be covered by applause. **This can be disorienting**, but rehearsing your presentation in front of the camera will soon make that go away. In a live stream show, I use multiple instruments to keep the flow of the show moving so I don't have dead time as I tune or re-capo etc between songs. Dead time in a live stream is more disorienting to the audience <u>and</u> the performer than it is in a live performance. Remember, even though you can't see or hear your audience, they are there!   I've also taken to "back announcing " a song or sharing an anecdote as I switch instruments to keep the virtual audience connected.

It's much better if you have someone who can monitor the computer feed for you. I have to do it all myself, so I place the computer near the camera so I can see the outgoing image to make sure I'm centered in the shot and the audience can see what they need to. I also put a masking tape X on the floor like the TV pro's do so I can easily move back to the correct spot if I'm off center.

16) **So, do your research and homework** ahead of time, rehearse your presentation in front of the camera, do a test stream, then at "show time" ignore the tech and focus on the performance or presentation. Today's audiences are learning about this new medium just like we are and they are quite forgiving! As with everything in life, there will be mistakes, but you will get better as you do more of these. Remember, it's really all about sharing your passion and this is a new and ever more important way to do that!

Good luck! Feel free to email me questions at <u>vallillo@macomb.com</u>

Here's a list and prices of the equipment that i'm using:

Blackmagic Design UltraStudio Mini Recorder - Thunderbolt	**$220.00.**
BLUE Yeti Pro USB Mic	**$260.00**
Sony HDRCX455 Handi-cam Video (HDMI)	**$398.00**
100ft Cat6 Ethernet Cable	**$45.00**
OBS Software	**FREE**