



## Grassroots & New Media Outreach: A Match Made In Heaven



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**The recent discovery of GRB 030725 by an amateur astronomer using NASA's HETE observatory and the subsequent press coverage is evaluated as a case study in both grass roots and new media outreach. Key reasons for success are the leveraging of the natural excitement of amateur astronomers combined with new media channels (such as blogs) that are usually eager for astronomical news.**

### Key Definitions

**API:** Application Program Interface. A set of rules and standards programmers can adopt to write software that interacts with other software programs that follow the same rules



"Astronomy Livejournal": Example of a blog

**Blogs:** A web site where an individual or a community post diary-like messages. The messages can be based on common or random topics. The messages are frequently posted to many blogs at the same time and discussions sometimes follow. Also known as journals or web logs.



"OSS-Update": Example of a mailing list

**Mailing Lists:** A community of people who discuss a common topic by sending an e-mail to a single address which then is propagated to all community members. Sometimes also known as discussion groups, list-servs, groups, or e-mail lists.



"Starstuff": Example of a portal

**Portal:** A web site that provides links to other web sites of a similar topic. They sometimes also carry news and online discussion forums.

**Zine:** A small publication dedicated to a specific topic. They are usually published online by amateur publishers and writers.

### Who

The AAVSO International High Energy Network is an international network of observers who have given over 100 talks and written over 30 articles in local periodicals. The goal of the network is to observe the afterglows of Gamma Ray Bursts in support of HETE and SWiFT, blazars in support of GLAST and magnetic variables in support of XMM-Newton. The network has highly trained CCD observers and are open to any observing project. Just ask!

### What

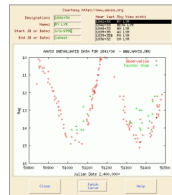
The optical afterglow to GRB030725 was the first ever discovered by an amateur astronomer. GRB afterglows are among the most elusive objects to observe. The AAVSO & NASA recognized the achievement by issuing a joint press release which received significant coverage throughout the world.

### Where

All of the web sites for the major amateur astronomy magazines carried this news item. In addition, blogs, e-mail mailing lists, local newspapers and radio stations provided coverage.

### How

The power of a well-crafted NASA press release goes without saying. But that is only the start. We made use of some new media channels to get word out on the grassroots level.



AAVSO Light Curve Loaded From Xephem Astronomical Software Program

### Conclusion

Don't stop with a press release. With a minimal amount of effort the story can be distributed to a grass roots network of web sites and publications that will give the story a life of its own and allow it to be perpetuated by those who are most interested in it. Skip the gatekeepers and go straight to the audience.



**Blogs:** We posted a link to and very short summary of the press release on numerous astronomy-related blogs. Usually these communities are eager to receive any information from a professional. They take these posts and cross-post them into their own blogs and journals propagating the story into hundreds of blogs, some with thousands of readers. The key is to 1. Post an interesting story 2. Keep it short and 3. Publicly state the organization you work for (to add respectability).

**Mailing Lists:** We went to mailing lists and posted a similar post we made to the blogs. These lists reach a smaller number of people but are more intimate since they arrive in e-mail. It is important not to post anything that could be viewed as an advertisement.

**Portals & Zines:** There are many science related web sites out there. All it takes to get a story carried is to simply drop a short and respectful note to the webmaster. These sites are also usually starving for good content and are read by loyal readers.

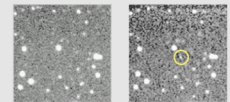
**Newsletters:** Many organizations periodically publish electronic newsletters. Send a short paragraph to the editor which they can easily paste into their newsletter.

**Local Publications:** Everyone loves a hometown hero. Find out where the PTs of your story were born, went to school and now live. Contact the local media outlets. We focused on African outlets and received good coverage both in print, radio and via online African portals and zines.

**Software:** The AAVSO has developed APIs with two popular planetarium software packages that allow users of the software to access data and resources from the AAVSO. While this did not have a direct impact on GRB030725 coverage it has provided a significant impact on our overall EPO success. All it took was an e-mail to the authors of the programs who were all eager to work with us.



### Timeline of Events



Discovery Images by Berto Monard

**01:05 GMT July 26:** Monard reports a possible afterglow to the AAVSO High Energy Network Discussion Group.

**02:27 GMT July 26:** AAVSO announces Monard's coordinates (GCN #2324)

**18:41 GMT July 29:** The Danish 1.5m telescope at the European Southern Observatory observed the field and confirmed Monard's discovery. (GCN #2335)

**August 12:** NASA and AAVSO issue joint press releases

**August 12:** Sky & Telescope features the discovery on their home page with a full article

**August 14:** Astronomy magazine features the discovery on their home page with a full article

**August 14:** Spaceflightnow.com reprints press release

**August 13:** Society of Amateur Scientists includes press release in its weekly bulletin

**September 3:** Science in Africa, a monthly online journal dedicated to scientific research in Africa, covers the discovery

**October 12:** South African Sunday Times covers the discovery

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