

# Data-driven journalism wins in today's digital world

 By Leigh Andrews

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The UK's Drum Online Media Awards identify the cleverest, boldest and most original purveyors of news and views from around the world. South African Mohammed Haddad is a senior interactive producer with Al Jazeera, heading up their interactive department. Enter Haddad's team's work into the awards and you get three wins for Al Jazeera English Online - here's how...

The interactive department at Al Jazeera English Online is small, passionate, and tells visual, data-rich stories. They've clearly mastered the medium, with their *Palestine Remix* project beating out big digital names like Vice News, Channel 4 News Online, the Huffington Post, the Guardian and BBC News Online in winning two Drum Online Media Awards in London recently, for outstanding digital team and best technical innovation, as well as the best photography award for another Al Jazeera project, the 'Portrait of a Yogi' gallery project. This was a photographic exploration of the power of yoga to unite people across cultural and physical divides, commended at the award for its innovative, dynamic approach to photography.

I found out more from Haddad about what these wins means for Al Jazeera in particular and the entire realm of data-driven journalism in general...

## ■ 1. Congrats on the wins! What's the impact for your team?



Mohammed El-Haddad

**Haddad:** Winning two awards for the best digital team and best technical innovation is a huge privilege for Al Jazeera. A lot of dedicated people worked countless long hours to launch this project in the three months that we had to deliver.

For me personally, this project combined my passion for the story of Palestine with my love for interactive storytelling. Being on the cutting edge of technology is a huge driving force to keep ahead of the game on a story that truly matters.

## ■ 2. It's quite the accolade. Tell us how your background led to your work at Al Jazeera and the Palestine Remix project in particular...

**Haddad:** Well, my dad is Palestinian and my mom is South African. I grew up in Germiston, an old mining town in Johannesburg. I've always been interested in computers and building things, so I completed my undergrad in Computer Science from Unisa and my postgrad in Information Systems from Wits University. I then spent some time researching crowdsourcing applications in Africa, then in 2011 joined Al Jazeera to work as a data journalist. It was a very vibrant time to be in that space as lots of things were happening, both in the Arab world and in the field of data journalism. Many US and UK newsrooms had already established teams of data-driven storytellers, so it didn't take me long to realise the opportunity I had. I've since built up a team of very passionate journalists, designers and developers, with the everyday job of finding the best way possible to visually tell a story. For *Palestine Remix*, we brought together a team of former Knight-Mozilla OpenNews fellows, along with filmmakers, producers, editors, writers, designers and developers, all working in four different languages.

## ■ 3. That's quite the undertaking. What did your role entail, as Palestine Remix technical project lead?

**Haddad:** I was involved in architecting the storytelling layers of *Palestine Remix*. I also developed the interactive maps, data visualisations and custom elements for the websites. My job was to make sure that our journalists, designers and

developers were speaking the same language. When it comes to editorially-driven interactive websites, one of the most important aspects is to ensure that every single line of code and every visual cue is crafted with the storytelling process in mind.



The Drum Online Media Awards

#### ■ 4. Tell us what makes 'Palestine Remix' so special.

**Haddad:** Interactive storytelling isn't really that interactive for the most part. Opening up your content to your viewers by allowing them to mix and match your videos is very interactive. The thing that makes Palestine Remix special is how it weaves the latest HTML5 video technology built by our team with the very detailed story of Palestine.

It's a network-wide initiative that allowed users to access some of Al Jazeera's best documentaries on Palestine. The project also incorporated interactive maps and timelines, which helped users to truly understand and contextualise the Palestinian issues.

#### ■ 5. Let's end by exploring the importance of finding new ways of storytelling...

**Haddad:** Well, new isn't always better. But new forms of storytelling give you the ability to widen and deepen your storytelling toolbox. The more technical capabilities that you have, the more informed decisions you can take when it comes to choosing the best narrative for a particular story. After all, the narrative is not the story itself, but the telling of the story.

That's inspiring. Click here for more on [The Drum Online Media Awards](#), now in its fourth year, [here for more](#) on *Palestine Remix* and [here for more](#) on *Portrait of a Yogi*.

## ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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