Scholarship and Professional Work - Communication

College of Communication

7-30-2007

Public media's social media experiments: risk, opportunity, challenge

Abbey B. Levenshus

July 2007

PUBLIC RADIO'S SOCIAL MEDIA EXPERIMENTS:

Risk, Opportunity, Challenge

By
Abbey Blake Levenshus

Foreword by
Jake Shapiro

Introduction by
Pat Aufderheide

A Future of Public Media Project
Funded by the Ford Foundation

centerforsocialmedia.org

PUBLIC RADIO'S SOCIAL MEDIA EXPERIMENTS:

Risk, Opportunity, Challenge

FOREWORD

By Jake Shapiro
Executive Director
The Public Radio
Exchange (PRX)

Over the past year and a half, I've participated in an increasing number of discussions about how, and whether, stations should embrace social media, resulting in some new insights as well as a sense that there is more happening than anyone was tracking or comprehending.

So I'm grateful that the Center for Social Media stepped in to take a broader look at the landscape in this excellent report by Abbey Levenshus. PRX itself has been incubated within the Station Resource Group as a collaborative venture with Atlantic Public Media, helping connect these inquiries to a growing network of interested stations, producers, and public media institutions.

Launched in 2003, PRX—an open distribution platform connecting public radio stations and a diverse range of content producers—has been in the vanguard of the "Web 2.0" wave of Internet services and offers a unique vantage point on public radio's new media efforts.

I believe public radio can play a transformative role in participatory media. The Internet enables interactions and connections that can greatly extend the educational and cultural goals of public service media. Public radio brings considerable strengths to bear—a large and loyal audience, strong brands and programs, and a local presence in communities across the country.

While new platforms are enabling content creators and new intermediaries to connect with audiences—and audiences with each other—far beyond the physical boundaries of local

July 2007

broadcast spectrum, local public radio stations remain the primary point of contact for most of the nearly 30 million people who tune in to public radio every week.

In the first decade of the Web, even the most ambitious stations had an online presence that was barely a fraction of the reach and relevance of their broadcast service. Station Web sites have often acted as informational supplements to broadcast offerings, with occasional examples of unique content and some interactive features, such as message boards.

While there are many disruptive aspects of new media and technology, including a new mingling of geographically defined communities and self-selected interests, stations now face new opportunities and incentives to engage the public online.

There are obstacles—limited resources, the biases of the broadcast business, unfamiliar rules of engagement. But the same low barriers to entry that enable remarkable digital innovation also make it possible for stations to make relatively low-cost experimentation part of their strategy going forward.

It is encouraging to see both the risk taking and realism chronicled here. I hope this report helps spark a lively discussion about public radio's next steps.

.

INTRODUCTION

By Pat Aufderheide
Professor and Director, Center for Social Media

The advent of digital social media tools—the Flickrs, del.icio.uses, Facebooks and wikis of the digital universe—has created new opportunities for people who make public media. It hasn't fundamentally changed the nature of the challenge. Public broadcasting was founded to take advantage of what were then the latest communications technologies in order to build a vigorous democratic culture. When Lyndon Johnson signed the 1967 Public Broadcasting Act into law, he said, "Today our problem is not making miracles—but managing miracles." That is true again today.
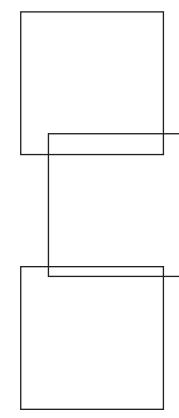
Pubcasters have evolved a sturdy sense of mission since 1967—to inform, entertain, and educate the American public, and particularly to reach out beyond the narrow strictures of bottom-line media.

Throughout the twentieth century, the mass media inevitably stood in for the "public." Mediamakers attempted, through what they talked about, what they chose to highlight, whom they chose to feature, to model a kind of "pseudo-public sphere" on the air. Broadcasters decided what the public might have decided was important, whom the public might want to hear from, what the nature of controversies important to them were.

Social media tools promise a different kind of public media in the future: a public media in which members of the public play an active role in shaping media, and in so doing create a living public forum. This is a vision that displaces some traditional media roles—for instance, that of the audience. The entity formerly known as the audience could become a constantly morphing set of active makers and users of media for and in public life. Democratic participation could be triggered and enabled and even expressed through public media.

But this future is only one of many possible futures for tomorrow's inevitably social media. If social media is to serve democratic life, it needs to be cultivated, nurtured, and encouraged in the direction of democratic public culture. There are no better potential agents of that support than today's public broadcasters, if they choose to undertake that role.

Of course, public broadcasters don't live in the future. They live in a world where mass media still rule, where pledge drives can determine their fates, where appropriations committees must be wooed, and where news addicts, classical music fanatics, and bluegrass, jazz, hip-hop and downtown aficionados all want their station to reflect their interests.

How can public broadcasters both survive today and cultivate tomorrow's possibilities for democratic culture?

With the help of Public Radio Exchange (PRX), the Center for Social Media went looking for people assuming that challenge, and found several public radio projects whose experiences, both positive and negative, suggest the challenges before public broadcasters today. The research and analysis that Abbey Levenshus has provided can help not only public broadcasters but many more people who are interested in the democratic and public potential of new media to understand the opportunities and obstacles before us.

PUBLIC RADIO'S SOCIAL MEDIA EXPERIMENTS:
RISK, OPPORTUNITY, CHALLENGE

By Abbey Blake Levenshus
Public Communication Division, School of Communication, American University

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

How are public radio stations taking advantage of social media tools to expand their base and enhance their service to their mission? Through a survey of U.S. public radio stations and case studies of four stations successfully using social media, this study provides a snapshot of the realities for U.S. public radio stations wanting to use social media to engage audiences. Results of a survey of 77 station staff, along with case studies of four stations' social media projects, reveal ambivalence about social media. Station executives both seek to explore social media opportunities and also resist experiments, because of lack of knowledge, because of resource allocation, and because of institutional culture. Current experiments at early-adopter stations demonstrate that social media experiments do require resource reallocation and still lack persuasive and appropriate metrics but nonetheless have returned significant benefits to the stations, particularly in terms of serving the core mission of public broadcasting: contributing to a rich and participatory public culture. More methodical goal setting and appropriate metrics will permit stations to document both their successes and their challenges.

METHODS

This study used a survey and case studies to generate data. First, public radio staff completed online surveys using SurveyMonkey and paper survey forms. A survey invitation, link, and information about the study were sent to a public radio listserv and a National Federation of Community Broadcasters listserv and were included in two Public Radio Exchange (PRX) e-mail newsletters. Participants were encouraged to pass the link on to others in the public radio industry. Additionally, paper copies of the survey were distributed at the PRX booth at the Integrated Media Association conference in Boston from February 20 to February 24, 2007. This method of distribution favored those within public broadcasting already interested in social media. Fifty-two respondents (out of 77) voluntarily included their stations' call letters, showing 46 stations represented[1]. The small overlap of stations among the 52 who self-identified suggests that there was probably little overlap in the pool as a whole. Most were university and community licensees, in equal proportion. Half the respondents were station managers. The other half ranged widely from development director to Web manager and program director.

Four radio stations—Minnesota Public Radio (MPR--Minneapolis), KQED (San Francisco), KUT (Austin, Tex.), and WBEZ (Chicago)—were selected for possible case studies by Jake Shapiro, executive director of PRX) on the basis of their existing track record with social media. The author conducted open-ended interviews with a designated staff member at each station about the challenges of conducting social media experiments.[2]

SURVEY RESULTS

Public radio has barely scratched the surface of social media's potential, and many public radio stations have not begun to do that. A quarter of respondents—in a pool biased toward early adopters—said their stations conduct no social media activities. Nearly half have some social media engagement, but often only at the first level of involvement—linking to user content like blogs, wikis, or podcasts that are not on their own Web sites. A substantial minority use blogs that accept comments. The least likely social media activities included wikis and virtual reality and gaming or such virtual reality sites as SecondLife. Several reported plans for social media with Web site revamping.

Station representatives showed great ambivalence about social media. Most said that they are struggling with balancing resources, expectations, and new opportunities: "We are very interested in blogs that accept comments and offer several blogs without comments now; we are trying to figure out how to accept comments with limited staff and the fear of getting overwhelmed and having to pull back." About two-thirds of the respondents thought social media was a priority at their stations, but stations appear to invest few resources in the effort. Almost half of responding station representatives said the person who most often works on the station's social media activities dedicates less than one hour in a normal workday to the tasks. Three-quarters of respondents said that less than 5 percent of the station's overall budget is dedicated to social media. However, very few stations showed volunteers and interns conducting social media activities, possibly indicating concerns about control.

What is keeping them from social media experiments? Lack of resources is one obstacle: "We do not have enough staff to maintain a blog or other social media activities"; "No time (presently) to develop"; "Social media costs money, though few will admit this—they think it's free"; "Station employees do not have free time to engage in these dialogs." Some cited lack of knowledge: "Because we are ignorant of these technologies and can't understand their need." Some stations could not get buy-in from senior staff: "Senior management don't [sic] get it and we've been unable to convince them that this is 'now' and needs resources to set up and maintain."

Even if resources were allocated, some would have concern over standards and quality in participatory media: " . . . some of the current models might not satisfy certain journalistic standards, not to mention civility, rational, fact-based discussion, etc."; "Allowing the community a place on our site requires careful screening and editing. We spent 50 years establishing a credible voice; we can't allow just anyone to represent our station." Some say that their audiences don't want it yet: "Value is unclear. Users are not asking for it."

Why bother at all? Audience connection was overwhelmingly the primary goal of stations using social media, outranking other station aims, such as increasing audience and revenue. Other popularly chosen goals in the survey included increasing audience, increasing revenue, and generating Web site content.

Respondents did believe, overall, that social media were effective. Half of respondents reported that their efforts had resulted in the station connecting with the community. Only a few respondents, however, gave any specific way in which to measure this (such as increasing audience or revenue).

CASE STUDIES

Telephone interviews revealed common beliefs that social media extend the core mission of public broadcasting. As MPR's Julia Schrenkler puts it, "Social media aligns with a lot of public broadcasting's mission. It wasn't a big stretch for us. Our audience—they don't just absorb. They're creative and funny and interested and usually have something fairly interesting to say." Schrenkler argues that public broadcasting has always been interactive. "If you have an e-mail and are getting feedback, you're getting audience interaction. Fund drives, testimonials, call-in shows, they're already interactive. Why not just build the tool?" Rich Dean of KUT points back to 1967 when the Corporation for Public Broadcasting was created by Congress. "The people who founded public radio were smart enough to know we needed to be a product of community, not just take their money. It's a lot easier to do that online than on the radio."

At these stations, representatives and their superiors see social interaction as core to any media, with new social media tools simply expanding the possibilities. "We look at social media as how we engage the audience across all channels, not just online, in a way that would be most impactful for people in our communities," said Dean. They see social media experiments as opportunities to parlay online relationships into face-to-face and community-building activities, to solidify relationships with existing audiences and find new ones. For instance, Daniel Ash at WBEZ hopes social media can help expand and diversify his station's audience, which, like many public radio stations, is mostly made up of white, college-educated baby boomers. He hopes that social media and other offerings will "superserve" the 18- to 24-year-olds. At MPR, social interaction is regarded as core to all projects.

At the same time, station representatives note that much holds them back even in reaching the category of "fast follower" in technology adoption. Stations need to balance current processes and reward structures with emerging opportunities. For instance, as public radio's funding is currently structured, stations use a mix of member support, foundation support, and corporate support to provide programming. Those sources usually expect deliverables of content and a measure of success based on reach and audience size.

Social media metrics are still in their infancy, and creative social media projects may not result in easy-to-see increases in membership or dollars. MPR sets individual goals for each social media effort at the outset of a project or launch and also uses such metrics as page impressions, online group membership, joining the Public Insight Network, and volunteering by participating. KQED's goal is always to increase reach and engagement with the audience. KQED uses a metric called "people hours" that measures the time people are engaging with KQED. This could include listening, consuming content via page views, downloading podcasts, or other efforts. KQED staff keeps monthly statistics and turn in those statistics quarterly or annually in order to calculate the total number of hours that the audiences access station resources.

Success may be different within different contexts, as well. For instance, MPR's Gather, "a leading social networking and media site for adults, with some of the highest-quality user-generated content on the Internet," has been highly successful at involving, as of this printing, 350,000 people in a social networking platform. It has also been a valuable site of experimentation and a platform for MPR partnerships with both nonprofits and for-profit businesses. At the same time, the site's numbers are tiny for a social networking site, and such sites must grow or die.

It is easier to measure offline efforts, in terms of volunteers. KUT is able to measure the effectiveness of its Get Involved project by the number of volunteers who contact the organizations after it publicizes the need on its Web site and on the air.

It is difficult to budget for projects that are so closely interwoven with others and the core mission and almost impossible for researchers to get access to actual budget figures. Conclusions here are drawn from both surveys and interviews. It seems that stations allocate relatively few financial and human resources to the social media challenge and are very reluctant to allocate dollars for open-ended experiments. Although survey respondents had estimated that less than an hour a week is going into social media work, KUT's Dean believes that KUT's social media work is drawing at least half of a full-time employee's time, precisely because social media is interactive and when listeners become cocreators of content, they want a response from the station. The stations most committed to social media, such as MPR, do not separately allocate resources to social media, since all media share this interactive engagement mission for them. Chicago Public Radio's Vocalo project is a significant time and financial investment involving several budget line items. Vocalo will exist as a stand-alone unit within Chicago Public Radio with a projected staff of 19 and a current staff of 7 hosts-producers. It is run by a separate general manager. While Chicago Public Radio has not disclosed Vocalo's budget details, management expects the full-power annual operating costs to exceed $1 million per year. The revenue strategy is very different from traditional public radio. In lieu of on-air pledge drives, Vocalo will rely on sponsorships and Web-based revenue.

There is also a skill set and knowledge gap in public radio when it comes to Web technology and social media tools. Broadcasters, and especially broadcasting executives, typically do not have sophisticated Internet skills. "Expecting a 40-year radio veteran to embrace blogging isn't realistic. We have a huge technology-cultural gap within the stations—many of our employees are technophobes!" Dean notes.

TOOLS AND PROJECTS

The early-adopter stations featured in the case studies use commonly used, off-the-shelf social media platforms and are beginning to build their own as well. They use these tools to build new relationships with their users, to reinforce brand identity, and to emphasize their distinctively local role.

Flickr

KQED, KUT, and WBEZ use Flickr, an online photo management and sharing tool, on their Web sites. After rejecting professional photographs of Austin, which featured images from the commercial town center, station staff searched Flickr for Austin themes then e-mailed the owners for permission to use the pictures on the KUT site; permission was granted in almost every case. The photos change throughout the day and make up the site's banner, complete with photo credits in the lower corner of the image. Visitors can click on the linked name to access the photographer's Flickr page.

WBEZ prominently features daily photos of Chicago scenes on its home page. Some photos come from Flickr; others are submitted directly to the station staff. Hovering over a photograph reveals the photographer's name. Even this simple social media effort was initially resisted. The news reporters were concerned that since Chicago Public Radio is primarily a news organization, users may mistake featured photos as journalistic. Daniel Ash commented, "If you frame it properly and frame it appropriately, [the site users and consumers] will understand. They're smarter than we give them credit for" (personal communication, April 5, 2007). Ash told the news operation that the Web's unique characteristics address their concern. When visitors come to the Web site, they can choose; they cannot in the broadcast environment. The station's responsibility is to label things appropriately, so that visitors could easily navigate to the content they want. The Photo of the Day functioned, for Ash, as a powerful tool of localism, countering what he sees as a public radio weakness. "NPR is one, albeit important, piece of public radio. Public radio is about stations producing for their local audience."

KQED keeps a Community Gallery: Photo of the Day on Flickr where users can submit their photos of people or images from Northern California and beyond. KQED.org's photo editor then selects from the group's images what to feature in the online KQED gallery. The gallery on the KQED Web site is housed under the Local Focus topic page with other social media tools.

KUT relies on submissions like this one from Flickr user CarlosRuis to keep its site looking local.

Blogs

Although each of the four stations uses blogs, MPR uses them the most. From its Your Voice page (http://minnesota.publicradio.org/your_voice/), users can access topical posts such as the Polinaut blog, which explores "the universe of campaigns and politics"; or program-related entries like the LoopHole blog, where discussions revolve around the MPR program *In the Loop.*

After initial experimentation with a blog on its own site, WBEZ now monitors an off-site blog (www. blog.chicagopublicradio.org) that is linked to the Chicago Public Radio Web site. The original concept was that the vice president of programming would maintain a blog. While generally it was successful, Ash describes some aspects as a "nightmare": "We had just eliminated jazz programming. Suddenly, all the jazz fans had a platform and were posting negative comments." Ash believed social media could work only if people on both sides felt free to express their ideas and opinions and engage with one another. The off-site blog was the solution.

KQED's blogs are organized by subject matter. KQED bloggers are community-based experts from partner organizations who operate under little editorial guidance from the station. A local food blogger submits weekly posts to their Bay Area Bites blog (www.kqed.org/weblog/food). Bay Area Bites is hosted on the KQED site and features a "Produced by KQED" header, but it has its own brand that does not match that of KQED. The blog shows a list of contributors and a tagline that reads, "culinary rants and raves from bay area foodies and professionals."

Subscribing to what Rich Dean calls a "pretty loose definition of the word *blog*," KUT features a Recent Blog Entries section on the bottom of its home page. The list includes titles such as "Folkways" and "Aielli Unleashed" that contain mostly notes from hosts or producers. "Aielli Unleashed" is an online-only show that does not accept comments.

KUT has only blogs that do not accept comments. The station is not convinced that the resources put toward interactive blogging will be as powerful at engagement as face-to-face work, and it is also concerned that blog material might violate institutional sensibilities of the university licensor. Also, online personalities are unwilling to blog.

Forums

KQED, MPR, and WBEZ have online forums for listeners and site visitors. KQED hosts discussion boards but does not publicize them heavily. MPR listeners may post commentaries, likened to letters to the editor in a newspaper, directly on the MPR site, but most discussion forums take place on the social networking site Gather.com, which was founded in part by American Public Media, MPR's parent company. WBEZ hosts a forum page (www.wbez.org/Forum) that lists discussion threads and the number of comments submitted for each. Below each thread, e.g., The Open Forum, is a description, e.g., "Open discussion inspired by Chicago Public Radio." As of this writing, The Open Forum contains 15 topics and 80 posts.

WBEZ also uses message boards and discussion forms for individual programs. Forums are not ideal for all programs, however—when the immensely popular *This American Life* developed a message board for its fans years ago, it garnered a great deal of activity from listeners posting emotional responses to episodes, something that alarmed some of the show's subjects. WBEZ staff decided that they were comfortable with the show's fans setting up their own discussions about the show, but WBEZ would no longer provide the platform. The host's main concern was being able to continue the show and that meant maintaining his guests' trust. "When he asks people to open up their lives to a producer and journalist, there has to be some level of trust that you're going to treat them honestly, with integrity and care."

Online communities are organic and dynamic and have lives of their own. MPR faced a problem that became a solution when a particular online community on its message boards developed into a very small, very active group that eventually started meeting offline—and ruling the message boards. Rather than policing the group more, MPR decided to build the group its own area called the Listeners' Lounge. Now the Listeners' Lounge has its own Gather.com section that is barely moderated by MPR. Julia Schrenkler comments, "It was one of the best moves we've ever made. It kept them happy, kept our boards cleaner, and kept everyone happier."

Wikis

MPR considers its Minnewiki, which is launched in the fall of 2005 as a local music scene encyclopedia, to be one of its most successful social media projects (http://minnewiki.publicradio.org/index.php/Minnewiki_Home). MPR started the project by specifying clear guidelines while offering a minimal official presence and the necessary technical support and left the content creation to its audience. Like other wikis, Minnewiki's main page shows a visit and access count. At the time of writing, (April 13, 2007), the site had been accessed 48,264 times, meaning that there had been more than 48,000 points of access on the main page alone.

MPR's Minnewiki - minnewiki.publicradio.org

As with its blogging endeavors, KUT's participation in the wiki realm was affected by its university affiliation. The station put together a long document proposing the idea to create a wiki about Austin and Central Texas. Local organizations like the city's Subcommittee on Music were encouraging, but ultimately the university was not comfortable, says Dean, with the idea of creating intellectual property and giving it away. "They make billions of dollars on their research, and then we come to them and say, 'Hey, we created something, and we want to give it away.'" The university argued that the State of Texas did not approve of giving away content, and more importantly, it wanted KUT to moderate and edit all submitted content.

Offline Efforts

Some social media efforts aim to inspire offline, face-to-face actions. KUT encourages its listeners to volunteer through its Get Involved postings (http://kut.org/texas/get_involved). A partnership project with the United Way Volunteer Center's Hands On Central Texas, the Get Involved project highlights nonprofit organizations in Central Texas that are in need of volunteers. Dean said this is a win-win for the station and for the profiled organizations: KUT is extending its reach into the community, and the organizations gain access to KUT's listeners. The project also benefits KUT because it is seen as an active, involved community member that is "spending time doing something that makes a difference and spending time doing that instead of blogging."

QUEST is a new multimedia, interactive project focused on science and environmental issues in the Bay Area. KQED has partnered with local Bay Area organizations, such as zoos, museums, and laboratories, to co-create programs and Web content. The project includes blogs and Flickr photos and postings mapped to pinpoint where images were taken.

Image source: Eric Chan

KQED QUEST is a new multimedia, interactive project focused on science and environmental issues in the Bay Area.

WBEZ also uses social media efforts to achieve offline actions. The public affairs series *Chicago Matters* produces live and taped town hall forums on a single topic, in conjunction with print partners. A recent series, *Chicago Matters: Beyond Borders*, explores immigrant labor. The social media piece helps inform the journalists' work, but it also helps the public extend the conversation on the Web site after the segments have aired on WBEZ.

Social Networking Sites

In the fall of 2005, MPR's parent company, American Public Media Group, helped start Gather.com, a for-profit social networking site for adults. Gather.com allows MPR to reach a larger audience without having to expend resources on bulletin board software and other associated hosting costs. Users access the multiple Gather groups (Minnesota Life, Minnesota Music, Minnesota Politics, Minnesota Readers, etc.) through MPR's Your Voice page (http://minnesota.publicradio.org/your_voice/) or directly at Gather.com. MPR or American Public Media staff helps to ensure that conversations stay on point. Schrenkler reasons that the staff presence reinforces the message, "We're tending the space. We've got our eyes on it. Our producers and hosts actually look at this content, so if you wanted to be your own citizen journalist and do a series on Minnesota Life, you're pretty much guaranteed someone here will see it."

Public Insight Journalism

Thousands of Minnesotans have enlisted in the Public Insight Network (PIN), which allows MPR to tap these community members as information sources. Each week PIN members donate their expertise to MPR reporters and editors, who may follow up with PIN members or at least use their suggestions in news stories. PIN turns listeners into potential sources.

Vocalo

WBEZ is launching Vocalo, a new over-the-air and online station where content is created by its audience. At Vocalo—a portmanteau of the words "vocal" and "zocalo," the Spanish term for public square—listeners upload reports, conversations, music, and more to a Web site that serves as the online platform and destination for a community. The best Web content will be transmitted over the main analog channel. Hosts will navigate listeners through eclectic content while noting the voices and stories of the Chicago regional culture. Vocalo is aimed at a younger, more diverse, technology-savvy audience that Chicago Public Radio has not yet been fully able to capture.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Early-adopter station representatives provided, both by example and suggestion, advice for other public broadcasters plunging into social media.

Match the mission: Helping station staff and management see how social media aligns with the broader mission of public radio and the specific mission of a station can help create buy-in and provide direction for the effort. WBEZ's Ash says, "There's always this sense of urgency every time something new comes up like MySpace, podcasts, Facebook, YouTube . . . I'm not afraid to be second or third in doing something, because our mandate is service, not profit, not market share. We want that. We want significant audience numbers. We want people to participate . . .Will that tool let us serve our audience in a way that meets our vision, mission, brand?"

Resist the fear factor: Ash comments, "Forget about being fearful about whether radio will stop being relevant. Think about the content you produce and how you deliver it and to whom you deliver it. Make everything about what the content means to people."

Trust your audience: Station representatives consistently found that their audiences were worthy of their trust. "To a certain extent, you also have to trust the online community to police itself. You can set expectations for how people should behave and put policies in place to justify screening or evicting people from the conversation, but to engage in social media relationships, you have to release some of that control," says Schenkler. Furthermore, audiences that turn into contributors reveal an unsuspected wealth of knowledge, as Public Insight Journalism revealed.

Get buy-in at the top: If the folks at the top don't believe in social media, it will not happen. "Have a full-time dedicated person at most stations and you need everyone on staff to contribute. It can't be the Web person's job to post all the content," notes Dean.
Choose a champion: Identify a leader for your social media efforts and ensure that he or she has the endorsement from someone at the top—preferably the whole management team. Don't expect results until a leader or team is in place. Without a champion, nothing happens.

Dedicate resources: While social media might often cost less than new on-air features, equipment, or programs, it's not free. It might be the cost of a new staff member or a revamped Web site with interactive capability.

Integrate: Stand-alone social media efforts that are not integrated into the culture and larger program offerings can look inauthentic and out of place. Those stations undertaking social media at a strategic, organizational cultural level constantly look for ways to integrate social media into what they're doing.

Define and measure success: Use metrics that reflect the core function of interactivity and the mission of public engagement.

CONCLUSION

Social media strategies are, simply, unavoidable for anyone in mass media today. They also create unique opportunities for mass media with a public mission. And they are also terrifying to anyone managing a budget and staff for an existing broadcast station. Many public broadcasting stations today, even those with a demonstrated interest in these opportunities, find it challenging to experiment with them. They lack the hard evidence that taking scarce resources from existing missions will generate new resources. They lack knowledge and executive commitment.

Early adopter experience demonstrates that social media experiments do indeed require reallocation of resources, and that assessment methods remain experimental. At the same time, these stations' experiences demonstrate that new kinds of relationships with often previously undiscovered publics can be forged. Not only the early-adopter individuals at these stations, but the highest-level station executives have become convinced that these strategies are essential to the future of public broadcasting. At the same time, they recognize that transition requires a cautious course that makes the mission of public broadcasting central to any media effort.

Endnotes
1 KCBX, KCND, KDRT-LP, KGLT-FM, KGOU, KLTS, KOPB-FM, KPBX KSFC, KPCC - Los Angeles, KPOV/IPFM, KQED/NCPB (2), KRWG FM, KSKA, KSTX, KUHF, KUNM, KUNV, KUSP, KWAX, "KWSU- TV, KWSU- AM, many more," MPR (2), NCPR (2), NJN, WAER, WBEZ, WBFO, WCBE, WDAV, WELH, WFMU, WGBH, WGTE, WGTE LaShelle, WHMT TV and Radio, WITF, WLRN, WMUB – FM (2), WOSU, WSIU, WSUI/KSUI, WTMD, WUIS, WUNC, WUOM, WVPS Vermont Public Radio.

2 Station representatives were Daniel Ash, VP, strategic communications, WBEZ, Chicago Public Radio; Rich Dean, director of Channels, KUT, Austin, Tex.; Tim Olson, interactive director, KQED, San Francisco; Julia Schrenkler, interactive producer, Minnesota Public Radio.

SURVEY RESPONSES

Which role most closely matches yours at the station? N=77

Role	Response Percent	Response Count
Station Manager	49.4	38
Community Relations	2.6	2
Membership/Development	5.2	4
Technical/Engineer	3.9	3
On-Air Personality	2.6	2
Volunteer	1.3	1
Intern	0	0
Other (please specify)	35.1	27

Which category most closely matches your station? N=77

Category	Response Percent	Response Count
University licensee	46.8	36
Community licensee	39	30
Local authority (school board/state)	2.6	2
Low-Power FM	2.6	2
Other (please specify)	9.1	7

Does your station use any of the following social media activities?
N=77

Social Media Activities	Response Percent	Response Count
Blogs that accept comments	39	30
Wikis	7.8	6
Flickr or other interactive photo gallery that accepts user content	27.3	21
Links to user content like blogs, wikis or podcasts	44.2	34
Social networking websites like MySpace, LiveJournal, Facebook, Gather.com, etc.	24.7	19
Virtual reality and gaming sites like SecondLife	1.3	1
None	26	20
Other (please specify)	18.2	14

What goal/goals does your station have for its social media activities?
N=66

Goal	Response Percent	Response Count
Increase audience for station	80.3	53
Increase revenue/donations from listeners/members	63.6	42
Differentiate from other stations in market and/or national services	51.5	34
Connect with the community	97	64
Improve station's programming	53	35
Generate content for station's website	59.1	39
Other (please specify)	10.6	7

If your station engages in social media activities,
when did you begin doing so? N=56

When	Response Percent	Response Count
2006 – Present	30.4	17
2004 or 2005	44.6	25
2002 or 2003	8.9	5
2000 or 2001	8.9	5
Earlier than 2000	7.1	4

On a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being "low priority" and 5 being "high priority,"
please indicate how important your station considers social media efforts. N=65

Priority Level	Response Percent	Response Count
1 – Low Priority	12.3	8
2	20	13
3	27.7	18
4	24.6	16
5 – High Priority	15.4	10

Who at your station is conducting social media activities?
N=61

Who Conducts	Response Percent	Response Counts
Station Manager	31.2	19
Community Relations	23	14
Membership/Development	27.9	17
Technical/Engineer	13.1	8
On-Air Personality	29.5	18
Volunteer	16.4	10
Intern	8.2	5
Other (please specify)	63.9	39

Thinking of the person who most often works on the station's social media activities,
how much of that person's normal workday is dedicated to social media activities? N=65

Hours	Response Percent	Response Count
Less than 1 hour	54.7	35
1 – 2 hours	26.6	17
More than 2 hours	12.5	8
Other (please specify)	6.3	4

What percent of your station's overall budget is dedicated to social media efforts? N=63

Budget Percentage	Response Percent	Response Count
Less than 5 percent	92.1	58
5 – 14 percent	7.9	5
15 – 24 percent	0	0
25 – 34 percent	0	0
35 percent or MORE	0	0

What have the results been of your station's social media efforts?
N=59

Results	Response Percent	Response Count
Increased audience for station	11.9	7
Increased revenue/donations from listeners/members	11.9	7
Differentiated from other stations in market and/or national services	23.7	14
Connected with community	66.1	39
Improved programming	20.3	12
Generated content for station's website	47.5	28
None of the above	20.3	12
Other (please specify)	18.6	11

PARTICIPANTS

Patricia Aufderheide is a professor in the School of Communication at American University in Washington, D.C., and the director of the Center for Social Media there. She is the author of, among others works, *Documentary Flim: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2007), *The Daily Planet* (University of Minnesota Press, 2000), and *Communications Policy in the Public Interest* (Guilford Press, 1999). She has been a Fulbright and John Simon Guggenheim fellow and has served as a juror at the Sundance Film Festival among others. Aufderheide is a prolific cultural journalist, policy analyst, and editor on media and society and has received numerous journalism and scholarly awards, including a career achievement award in 2006 from the International Documentary Association. Aufderheide serves on the board of directors of Kartemquin Films, a leading independent social documentary production company, and on the editorial boards of a variety of publications, including *Communication Law and Policy* and the newspaper *In These Times.* She has served on the board of directors of the Independent Television Service, which produces innovative television programming for underserved audiences under the umbrella of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, and on the film advisory board of the National Gallery of Art. She received her PhD in history from the University of Minnesota.

Abbey Levenshus recently earned her master's degree in public communication at American University and plans to pursue a PhD in communications. Her research interests include the communication of faith and politics, communication's role in public policy, and the impact of interactive Web tools on public broadcasting. Her professional experience includes high-level communication work in the government and corporate sectors. She served as communications director for both a U.S. representative and a political technology company in Washington, D.C.

Jake Shapiro is executive director of the Public Radio Exchange (PRX), a nonprofit Web-based service for distribution, review, and licensing of radio programs. Prior to helping launch PRX in 2003, he served as associate director of the Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard Law School, where he oversaw projects related to intellectual property, digital media, and Internet architecture. He remains a Berkman Center Fellow. Shapiro has worked as a producer with *The Connection,* a nationally distributed call-in talk show from WBUR in Boston. He serves on the boards of the Association of Independents in Radio, *Open Source* Media (producers of Open Source with Christopher Lydon from PRI), the Integrated Media Association, and the Conversations Network. He is also an independent musician and composer and has recorded and performed on guitar and cello with numerous groups, most recently the Boston rock band Two Ton Shoe.

The **Public Radio Exchange** is an online marketplace for distribution, review, and licensing of public radio programming. PRX is also a growing social network and community of listeners, producers, and stations collaborating to reshape public radio. The mission of PRX is to create more opportunities for diverse programming of exceptional quality, interest, and importance to reach more listeners.

The **Center for Social Media** showcases and analyzes strategies to use media as creative tools for public knowledge and action. It focuses on social documentaries for civil society and democracy, and on the public media environment that supports them. The center is part of the School of Communication at American University.

Center for Social Media
School of Communication
American University
4400 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20016-8080
202-885-3107
socialmedia@american.edu
centerforsocialmedia.org