

WTVP IMAGINING (Chet Tomczyk) YEAR 2012

Perspective #1: From the Viewer's Living Room

There will be a multiplicity of viewing, gaming, informational and entertainment devices available, each with a remote control device. Someone will have invented yet another universal remote that is indecipherable and unusable.

Group viewing will be nonexistent as a multiplicity of channels and services will be available for each of the family members and interactive participation will be a solo activity. The service formerly known as public broadcasting will be still broadcasting on multiple channels providing reruns of Lawrence Welk to the three viewers over 119 years old who still call the station wondering when a new program will be available, pledge programs featuring an aging Wayne Dyer and an overweight Michael Flatley, and Boo Bad!, a program intended for fetuses (fetusi?) aged two to three weeks from conception -- all while station managers gather in some out-of-season venue complaining that PBS' dues are too high and that the PBS hierarchy does not understand them, and that we have no programs worth watching.

Wait, that may be reality, but my imaginings see no broadcast programming, per se. Information and entertainment are being delivered by a public service media conglomerate, national or regional in nature, that is totally transparent to the viewer. There will be a fee or assessment for each "program" accessed by any of several means, wired or wireless. Viewers will be "experiencers," totally interactive with content on a very personal basis. While there will be giant screens available for viewing and participating in major sporting events and concerts, there will continue to be individual viewing stations and devices. Appropriate content will be delivered to nurseries via interactive toys, through computers, household appliances, and perhaps even chips that can be inserted into teenagers' bodies like pierced earrings. Homes and bodies will be totally "wired." Local programming will be very personal, consist of personal broadcasts of kid events, e.g. a little league baseball game shot with a finger-sized mini-cam and delivered to grandma and grandpa and Aunt Essie via a wireless local access network. Public media, nee Public Broadcasting, will still be looking for a niche to serve and will be dependent on advertising and subscription for support. People will finally get sick of the dreck that wastes their time and give up caring about who is left on some island in Lake Erie. A revolution will start that causes the government and program providers to finally present content that has some meat to it, some relevance, some utility to enhance, inspire and illuminate. Public media will be recruited to again rediscover and roll that wheel.

Perspective# 2: From the Board Room of a Local Foundation

Local foundations will wonder what happened to the small market station that once served their constituency. They will lament its passing for lack of adequate funding in the previous 6 years, and begin looking for regional and national content providers to help address their cause. The few small stations that remain will be considered worthy of their support because they have hung in and stayed the course providing content and services that truly reflect the community in all its diversity and need. They will garner this support because they will be the last best hope of small communities wishing to fight off homogenization and maintain their unique character and style. The local stations will continue providing access to the world via a plethora of delivery methods, but they will be unique in their ability to inform their community, showcase the arts, and give voice to those who would not otherwise be heard. If this sounds familiar, it is because it is what we do and why we exist. Perhaps by 2012 that will be better recognized, appreciated and supported. We can only hope.

Perspective #3: From Inside the Station

What will change will be the names on the desks, the equipment being used and the languages being spoken. There will continue to be a buzz of great creativity and involvement. There will be continued passion to tell a good story, well-meaning, well-informed and talented individuals moving heaven and earth to serve the public. There will be an increasing number of young people in the station, still called “the station” only because no one will have found a better name for the place. They will be in the company of middle-aged people, of children and of boomers, all working at screens and editors to create content that will have interest and use for consumers throughout the area and around the world. They will be under-paid and over-motivated, using a combination of new, used and jerry-rigged equipment to create local masterpieces. They could do all this work from home, but they will come together in common cause and feed off each other’s creativity and passion. There will be a manager whose job it will be to keep the passion from getting too creative, but that’s another story. Their output will be valued but under-appreciated, excellent but largely unseen. They will make a difference to their community and to society at large.

And in the corner will be some individual working on a dream of what things might be like in 2018.