

IMAGINING YOUR STATION FROM MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES

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Perspective #1: From the Viewer's Living Room:

Unfortunately for the family, just like all other sectors of American life, digital has compartmentalized and individualized viewer choices. The implication for the American family is that individual members of the family interact less and less. They spend little time together. While the rich range of choices available to them allows them a variety of benefits, the lack of interaction with the rest of the family has begun to be a matter of concern to sociologists. Public television's newest strategy will be called the Family Initiative and will be designed to bring families together using its digital technology.

But until that is implemented, we find that digital TV has helped to separate the family. Family members each have their TVs and computers, which in some cases is one and the same. The youngest of the children watch PTV shows with interactive links on the newest versions of handheld remotes. In those homes that don't have the newest digital gear, the children spend their free time playing interactive games they find on PTV websites. These games are based on the children's programs which still are available through a regular TV schedule. But video on demand has significantly driven down ratings of the daily schedule. Luckily, the video on demand programming does have data imbedded in it which allows the kids to play games with the programming, enhancing both the entertainment and educational value for them.

Parents are pretty much at a loss on how to recreate "family time." And in many families the stress of home and work does not encourage them to spend much time thinking about it. Most 18-49 year olds don't want the mental challenge of traditional public television programming. They prefer to escape to stories from other programming services. Part of the Family Initiative will be an re-examination of adult needs and the kinds of services that best suits them. It will harken back to the old CPB research of a decade ago. Chunkable programming strategies will hit an all-time high. There will be a major outsourcing of program development away from the coasts to find low cost program formats that will work with this group. CPB will lead this effort. The result will be that the coasts actually will come up with new less expensive ways to reach audiences with traditional public television values of excellence and education. For example, partnering with colleges and universities and even some community theatres will be one programming initiative which will combine drama with the intellectual content that might otherwise only be found in the straight documentaries of **NOVA** or **THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE**.

Public television's traditional adult viewing audience of those 55+ is beginning to be split into two separate camps: baby-boomers who are relatively fluent in digital technology use and those from previous generations who find the new media somewhat daunting. Public television's role will be to streamline the process of selection so that the older group can continue to find

enjoyment in our traditional offerings. PTV engineers will be at the forefront of creating handheld remotes that are elderly friendly. The first application of interactive television for the elderly will allow them to get local information embedded in national health programming. Public television will lead the way as PBS and the National Center for Outreach formalize a partnership creating a health initiative aimed at elderly issues. Traditional forums, interactive television, and rich web-based information (complete with message boards) will make the effort the talk of the country. Viewers will be able to grab local contact information from the screen simply by pointing and clicking. By the flick of a button, information will be saved to their computer for later use or printed up immediately.

Each of these viewers will value the content and the effort of their local station to come to help them enrich their lives. And we will signal our value through an extraordinary person to person promotional campaign. [See below].

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

I am going to ask us to do something that 10 years ago I never would have thought about. I am going to ask for a five-year, \$5 million gift to our local public television station. Half of this grant is to be a matching grant to fund a local project endowment. The other half is to be a matching grant to fund a capital replacement endowment.

Ten years ago, my view of public television was that of most people: a nice local television station with many of my friends on their board which was known for its fund-raising programs and the occasional local documentary. Oh, yes. It also had its weekly public affairs talk shows. And, of course, it had those children's programs.

These were nice services, but I doubt that anyone would really miss it very much if it went away. The cable and satellite services were providing similar programs, and although they may not have had the extensive research that public television put into its shows, most people would not be able tell one channel from another.

I knew they did something in educational outreach, but for the life of me, I didn't know what it was. I'm sure it was good stuff, because they always did good stuff, but it didn't have much impact, as far as I was concerned.

But then, something happened. I don't know if it was the new digital technology they got, or the threat of the loss of federal funding, or some new leadership locally or nationally, but they changed their attitude ... and their priorities. By that I mean where they spent their time. They started getting out more and talking with locals about what their station could do to help us move our community forward.

They had always talked about education. They had always been a broadcaster and back then they also began distributing on cable and through DVDs. But as a result of their discussions, they became more focused and started to ask what could they be proactive about and how could they have an impact in public education.

They also started talking about economic development of all things. How could a broadcaster do anything about economic development? They met with city leaders both in government and business. It was hard getting those meetings because they were just a “nice local charity.” Not very important, but nice. And we didn’t have time to deal with things that didn’t have the potential of doing something significant. But they eventually met with everyone. And they started to plan what services they could offer that would help us create jobs and a viable work force.

We had issues with crime. Our aging housing stock was the source of many too many fires. After 911, homeland security became a buzz word. After Katrina, emergency planning, preparation and implementation was on everyone’s mind. The station began to talk about what they could do to improve our public safety.

The critical issues in our community: education, crime and public safety. They took them on. And now look at this nice public television station.

In education, they began a partnership with local colleges, school districts and educational experts to develop a unique video teacher training tool for those most difficult of learners, middle school students. The program was so successful that local teachers are demanding similar support for all levels of teaching. It is now being sold to school districts around the country. It is distributed by video tape, DVD, on the web and via broadcast. Teachers have the options of using it anyway they find convenient. They are now looking into using the model for specific subject areas.

They were rebuilding their aging facility and had talks with local, and state officials and commercial businessmen to see how their building plans might help stimulate the economy. They determined that they could best assist our region’s film/video initiative by building the largest of their three studios so that commercial television high definition productions could be brought to the city economically. They have just completed their second studio show and are in pre-production for a new NBC sitcom employing hundreds of locals and sending much needed tax revenues to government coffers.

Their digital technology brought them into contact with a software company that specializes in public safety. They put them in touch with local police and fire officials who are now using this software. The content is being broadcast by the station to public safety personnel with laptop computers throughout the region. Police management can see crime scenes on their computers and assist the officers on site in real time. Fire personnel have access through their cell phone screens to blueprints of buildings they are going to. Both the police and fire fighters are receiving this information through encrypted broadcasts from the station.

It took me a while to get it, but they are digital media, not TV.

They are not nice any more. They are essential.

But I do not ask for a matching grant for general operations. That must come from others locally. The station must demonstrate that it is enough of value that the community wants to keep it going with annual gifts. If the station can not attract operational support, it means that it has lost its way and is not fulfilling its responsibilities to the local community.

Our donation is for two purposes. First, we have now seen that this station has a vital role to play in addressing local needs. For years we thought of it as just a broadcaster. Its dynamic initiatives over the last few years have demonstrated that indeed it is more than a place on the dial. Its creative use of digital technology and, yes, its inspired use of outreach staff, have shown what public television really is capable of. And we need it.

Second, the truth of the matter is that technology is expensive and our poor community may not be able to keep up with the financial demands replacement of such equipment requires. The endowment we are encouraging, once matched, should provide much of the revenue the station needs. Its annual operational support will be able to be utilized to its full advantage on operations. And we need it to do just that.

In short, I have become a believer in the power of public television. Our community deserves the benefits that come from a fully funded operation that has only our region's advancement as its goal. Its values of education, diversity, integrity, engagement, excellence and creativity are our values, and its productive application of technology towards these values must be endorsed by us with the award of this grant.

Perspective #3: From Inside the Station

Our staff has always felt that our station is a supportive place, a home, a family of friends. Yes, we have had difficult personalities from time to time, but we have continued to feel that our workplace was unique, homey.

Well, it's a little different now. We have been in a new building for a few years with new people as we have begun sharing our facility with other like-missioned non-profits. That in itself has changed us.

We are still a supportive environment, but something has happened here. We have changed our direction. It used to be that we were pretty much a broadcasting operation. We did a few local series and a few local specials and lots of fund-raising programs.

But over the last few years, our emphasis has changed. We now are regularly putting together local projects, not local programs. And the time we spend seeking underwriting for them, as opposed to our daily broadcasts, has risen dramatically. Our thrust has gone from broadcast to impacting our community, from having people watch our programs, to having people use our content.

We used to work in a nice place. Now, we work in an important place.

The GM constantly comes back energized by conversations he has had with other non-profits and even some of the for-profits. We must have developed a dozen in-depth partnerships in the last year alone. It is true that we still have producer-driven ideas, but the percentage of those have dropped from 95% to 25% as we have become community-driven first. It is rare now that we do a project by ourselves. Almost inevitably, we will work with some other organization. Why? Because there is so much to be done and still so little time and resources in which to do it, that bringing in others is the only way to have impact.

And that word impact is always being thrown around. We will not just do a program. We will want something to happen as a result of the program. And to get the maximum impact, we will and often must shed the territoriality we once thought so important, because it is in the interest of our community to do so. We are now putting the community first. When we do that, our ideas become so much more effective.

Sometimes, it is not a television show at all, but instead we will supply digital media to support the effort. Sometimes, to further the content we will partner with radio stations or the print media. Sometimes, we will be the organization to create forums to engage people on a more intimate level.

And the odd thing is that we are getting more recognition than we ever did when we went it alone. That is because so many more people are being affected. And one of the intended consequences (though we never really believed it would happen), is that we are seeing an increase in donations as a result.

There is a new corporate culture. We still feel we are a homey place, but home just got more supportive, more concerned, because when we started to think about what we could do for our community, the process spread to our workplace as well.

We all feel we are part of something that will help shape the future of our region. That makes all of us feel empowered. And that is how public television should make everyone feel.