

Local Service Initiatives

Name of Initiative: Lakeland News at 10

Station: Lakeland Public Television

Contact Person: Bill Sanford – GM / Director of Engineering

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Briefly describe the initiative and be as specific as you can be about the products or services that the initiative includes.

Lakeland Public Television, serving northern and central Minnesota, produces a local thirty minute 10 PM nightly newscast Monday through Friday. Our local newscast is the only local television news that is available in our entire coverage area, and is therefore critically important to the citizens we serve. Lakeland News at Ten is a traditional 30 minute news cast with local news, weather and sports. While we do have a news, weather, and sports anchor in the studio every night, the newscast is very much field oriented with most of the stories shot in the field and edited and played to air. We have seven staff members dedicated to news with two reporters that work out of our Brainerd office (central MN) and a staff of 5 that work out of our main studio in Bemidji (northern MN). In addition to paid staff we rely heavily on volunteers and interns to crew many positions during the live production nightly at 10 PM.

How does this initiative fit into your “portfolio” of other Local Service Initiatives? Is it one of many initiatives and projects, or does it take the bulk of your “Local” resources?

Doing local news is EXTREMELY resource intensive and this project consumes the bulk of our local “discretionary” funds, therefore local news is our primary local production. We also do anywhere from 9-15 hour long televised live debates for various state offices during election years.

What station assets, competencies and/or relationships does the initiative build upon?

Local news has raised station awareness in the communities we serve. People identify Lakeland as an important community asset because we are bringing a much-needed service to area residents. We also have strengthened our relationship with Bemidji State University by utilizing Mass Communications students for various positions in the production crew for the news. This gives the students valuable “real-world” experience that helps them when seeking employment when the graduate.

How would you describe the community benefit of this work? What needs are being addressed?

All the communities we serve with news benefit greatly because the residents are better informed about what’s happening in their communities. We also showcase many important projects and organizations that typically would not get media exposure without Lakeland News.

Who is the “customer?”

The customer is every citizen in our viewing area.

How do you know or measure if the customer's needs are being met?

We do an annual program preference poll of our members and news always ranks within the top 10 programs that we air. News is also the first thing the general public talks about when our staff interacts with them.

Who benefits from the initiative?

Citizens within the entire area we serve.

How do you measure the benefits?

We don't do a good job with this.

Describe the financial model for the initiative, being as specific as possible. How much does it cost? What are the sources and amount of revenue? How does it fit into your station's overall economic model?

We spend roughly \$300,000 annually to produce this program. We raise about \$80,000 annually in underwriting around this program and gain additional membership revenue because of the high profile of our local news. This membership revenue is very difficult to measure because they may pledge around another program, but the reason they are familiar with us and watch our station is because of our local news. News does not break even and we invest all of our discretionary money into our news. As our budget gets tighter due to decreasing government funding and increasing expenses it has been increasingly difficult to balance our budget. This year we are beginning to get more aggressive in our search for grant funds to support the ongoing operation of the news.

Could other stations use this idea or model? Would it work for any size station or licensee type?

Probably only in small markets that are currently unserved by local television news.

I don't think it would be successful in markets that are served by local commercial broadcasters providing local news. It wouldn't make sense to try to compete with them. At least not with the traditional news, weather, and sports format that we use.

***Please send this information to Brian Edstrom: bedstrom@tpt.org**