

**Expectations for Objectivity and Balance in Multi-Platform
Distribution: Traditional and New Media**

By

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Section 396(g)(1)(A) of the Communications Act of 1934, as amended, authorizes CPB to “facilitate the full development of public telecommunications in which programs of high quality, diversity, creativity, excellence, and innovation, which are obtained from diverse sources, will be made available to public telecommunications entities, with strict adherence to objectivity and balance in all programs or series of programs of a controversial nature”. As part of its efforts to carry out these duties, CPB commissioned several white papers to independently examine CPB’s objectivity and balance mandate and provide feedback on its efforts to meet those obligations. This document is one of those white papers. The views expressed herein are solely those of the author(s) of this paper and not of CPB. CPB did not contribute to the contents of this paper, does not express an opinion about the views presented herein, and does not endorse its findings.

Introduction

When the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967 was passed, there was no such thing as multi-media, multi-platform or new media. Cable was more than a decade away. There was no Internet, no social networking sites, no Twitter, no blogs. User-generated content meant sending a letter to the editor that may or may not be printed. When it came to broadcast news and public affairs programming, letters from viewers and listeners were not always answered.

In 1967, the creation of public broadcasting was meant to add diverse voices and programming on television and radio to add to the existing commercial stations. On television, that meant a new source of information in addition to the three networks and a few independent stations in large markets. At that time, there was widespread criticism of the quality of television. Then, as now, critics complained that the Big Three broadcasters were filling their hours with entertainment even though their broadcasting licenses required a public service mandate. The concept behind public television was that it would provide the cultural and educational programming eschewed by the other networks because such programming was not profitable enough. In radio, that meant non-commercial additions to the dozens of music, news and talk outlets across the country. Public radio also would be broadcasting cultural, entertainment and news shows that the commercial stations did not air because they would not draw large audiences.

Under the 1967 statute, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) was charged with facilitating, “the full development of public telecommunications in which programs of high quality, diversity, creativity, excellence and innovation, which are obtained from diverse sources, will be made available to public telecommunications entities.”¹ But because the taxpayers funded public broadcasting, certain restrictions were placed on CPB. These restrictions included the provision that federally-funded programming must have “strict adherence to objectivity and balance in all programs or series of programs of a controversial nature.” Since news and public affairs programs often address controversial topics, this restriction meant that all such programming was subject to the objectivity and balance requirements.

This requirement proved to be problematic for CPB during its first 25 years of existence. CPB itself produces no programming and does not acquire or distribute programming. Its charter also prevents it from censoring, interfering with or controlling the content of any public telecommunication entities. So when, as has frequently occurred, politicians or other critics complained about public broadcasting programs as being unfair, unbalanced or biased, CPB had little in its arsenal available to deal with those complaints.

Perhaps CPB’s sole weapon to combat what it saw as a breach of the objectivity and balance standard was to cut off funding to any entity that failed to comply. Over the years, many of public broadcasting’s harshest critics have urged both CPB and the U.S.

¹ See Public Broadcasting Act of 1967, as amended, Subpart D at www.cpb.org/aboutpb/act/text.html.

Congress to cut off funding for some programs because of their controversial nature and the perception that these shows were biased. But CPB's board of directors has declined to go this route, partially because of a general fear that constantly threatening public broadcasting programs with cutting off funds had the potential of crossing over into areas of censorship - a move CPB was unwilling to make. CPB's board members often stated that they saw the board's role as that of a "firewall." CPB's Inspector General took that analogy one step further, and called it a "heat shield" that would protect public broadcasters and their programming from political interference.

Nevertheless this "Catch 22" situation made it difficult, if not impossible, for CPB to carry out its role of providing important programming at the same time of insuring objectivity and balance in that programming.

When Congress passed the Public Telecommunications Act in 1992, there were no new media or multi-media platforms on which public or commercial broadcasters could distribute their programming. The Internet was in nascent form; there was rudimentary e-mail, but the World Wide Web had not been developed. Although some commercial broadcasters were experimenting with synergies - commercial broadcasters and commercial newspapers began to form partnerships - those partnerships were fairly limited. Newspaper reporters appeared on broadcast news shows to discuss the news of the day. The television stations, in turn, promoted what was going to be in the newspaper the following day. As a result, congressional action regarding public broadcasting did

not concern itself with the Internet's potential or the impact that potential might have on public broadcasting standards.

One of the primary purposes of the 1992 Act was to reiterate Congress's commitment to holding public broadcasting's feet to the fire when it came to issues of objectivity and balance. Under the provisions, CPB was also given a specific directive to monitor the programming to ensure that it complied with the objectivity and balance provisions.

Among the provisions in the Public Telecommunications Act of 1992 was a reiteration of the requirement for a regular review of national public broadcasting programming for "quality, diversity, creativity, excellence, innovation, objectivity and balance." Subsequent to the passage of this law, CPB began providing annual "Open to the Public" reports to Congress. However, in 2005, CPB's Inspector General issued a report that was highly critical of CPB's attempts to both comply with the law and to ensure objectivity and balance in its programming. One of the Inspector General's recommendations was to "establish formal policies and procedures for conducting regular reviews of national programming for objectivity and balance. This policy should be developed in conjunction with all significant stakeholders in the public broadcasting community to ensure transparency and agreement on the criteria to be used to evaluate objectivity and balance."²

² See page 37 of the Review of the Alleged Actions Violating the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967, as amended, Report No. EPB503-602.

Following the release of the Inspector General’s report, CPB consulted with a group of deans from the nation’s top journalism schools as well as public broadcasters. Subsequent to that meeting a series of seven White Papers were commissioned, including this one, the seventh in the series.³ The decision to commission these White Papers came at a time when new media and multi-media innovations were exploding in the media world. Each day seemed to bring a new development from blogs to Twitter. Established or traditional media, including public broadcasting outlets, have been struggling financially and have embraced these developments in an attempt to retain their existing audiences and to reach out for new ones.

As this White Paper will document, the growth of new media as well as the growth of multi-media distribution on traditional media outlets will pose some exceptional challenges, as well as exceptional opportunities, for public broadcasting. For example, among the changes is the growth of “citizen journalism,” the idea that members of the public can now play the role of journalists by gathering, reporting, analyzing and disseminating the news. Although not professionally trained, these citizen journalists can still be eyewitnesses or knowledgeable about various events and can add insight and/or context to important events. Many news organizations have gravitated to the idea of citizen journalists for several reasons. First, at a time of economic uncertainty where newsrooms are cutting personnel and resources, deploying an army of citizen journalists can make up for a void in professional reporters. Second, citizen journalism is free – news organizations do not pay for the input from their public contributors. Third, these

³ To read the other White Papers, go to <http://www.cpb.org/aboutcpb/goals/objectivity/whitepapers/>

citizen journalists are often experts on the issues on which they are reporting, thus able to add context and nuance that professional journalists (who are by necessity generalists) might miss.

Mark Glaser, who writes the Mediashift blog for PBS, has authored “Your Guide to Citizen Journalism”. He says that “the idea behind citizen journalism is that people without professional training can use the tools of modern technology and the global distribution of the Internet to create, augment or fact-check media on their own or in collaboration with others. For example, you might write about a city council meeting on your blog or in an online forum. Or you could fact-check a newspaper article from the mainstream media and point out factual errors or bias on your blog. Or you might snap a digital photo of a newsworthy event happening in your town and post it online. Or you might videotape a similar event and post it on a site such as YouTube.”⁴ Thus citizen journalism can be seen as a complement to the mainstream media, regardless of the merits.

While Mr. Glaser accurately describes the concept of citizen journalism, what he misses is that many elements of the mainstream media are usurping the idea of citizen journalism by posting similar reports on their own Web sites or linking to them. The problem is that these citizen journalists do not necessarily follow the ethical principles of journalism that include disclosure of conflicts of interest, as well as disclosures of bias or self-interest. Sometimes even those news organizations that use citizen journalists do not

⁴ See <http://www.pbs.org/mediashift/2006/09/your-guide-to-citizen-journalism270.html> for Marc Glaser’s “Your Guide to Citizen Journalism”.

know about these conflicts because there are no requirements or guidelines that require citizen journalists to make such disclosures.

Overview

This White Paper is divided into three sections. To better understand the nature of how new media have affected both traditional commercial media and public broadcasting, the first section will focus on the current state of the new media environment in the broadcasting industry. This section will begin with the results of an online survey we conducted of a wide range of both commercial and public broadcasters. As part of the survey, we asked them how widespread the use of various new media and multi-media devices have become at their stations.⁵ In addition, the top news executives and those responsible for new media at NPR, PBS Interactive, and various PBS programs including *NOW* and *The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer* were also contacted. A discussion of what they are currently doing and plan to do will follow.

Because new media and multi-platform distributions have their own unique set of ethical issues, the next section of this White Paper will focus on a discussion of editorial standards and ethics for new media distribution. In addition, a number of bloggers for both public and commercial media were contacted to see how those standards have been put into place, and what problems and benefits those blogs have created for their news organizations.

⁵ See Appendix A for a copy of the survey questions.

The third and final section of the White Paper will include a specific set of recommendations for public broadcasters as they continue to struggle with ensuring objectivity and balance standards in a world of new media and multi-platform distribution.

New Media and Multi-Platform Definitions

Because much of new media is, by definition, new, there are a number of terms and definitions that have recently become part of the vocabulary. Since these terms will be used throughout this Paper, it is important that they be briefly defined. Please see Appendix A for new media and multi-media terms and their definitions.

PUBLIC AND COMMERCIAL BROADCASTERS DISCUSS NEW MEDIA

A significant number of public broadcasting stations produce some form of local news or public affairs programming. We sent open-ended surveys to commercial and public broadcasters throughout the United States asking them to comment on their use of various new media platforms.⁶ The respondents said that podcasting through their Web sites was the single most popular way new media supplements their traditional programming. Participants also mentioned blogs, RSS feeds, citizen journalism, and videos posted on YouTube.

⁶ See Appendix B for the list of questions.

The news directors on the commercial side mentioned blogging as the prevailing form of online content offered by their stations. Other media platforms mentioned most frequently included both Twitter and RSS feeds, user-generated content, podcasts, and YouTube videos. When asked what they were planning for in the coming years, commercial news directors emphasized mobility of content. They want to be able to send more video to viewers' mobile devices. As one respondent put it, "If it is new and reaches a broad audience, we will find a way to create content for it."

Several of the survey's respondents were unsure if new media has had an effect on their traditional distribution practices, but a number several cited definite changes in their newsgathering and production techniques. Radio stations reported an increase in listenership, noting the value of audience feedback online: "We are more conscious that our content is highly valuable and highly valued in more than one platform. We recognize that our content can have many lives. Our reporters carry cameras and will soon carry camcorders to get pictures for the Web."

"One of the new realities is the listener expectation of audio on-demand," added another respondent. "Listeners expect to be able to go to our Web site and download any programming they've heard on the station, particularly local news programming. We need to make sure everything is uploaded to our website ASAP because listeners expect it. It is also considered a customer service by our listeners who used to have to call to request transcripts and audio tapes of programs they've heard then wait to see if we could

actually get the material, dub it onto tape and send it to them. Now they can simply go to our Web site and download the program they want to hear or share it with a friend.”

Public broadcasters overwhelmingly said that these online platforms made it easier for them to reach their audiences and deliver a unique product. One noted that “It has given our productions a longer shelf life and at times allowed for ‘buzz’ about our productions to be generated. Traditional distribution was very ephemeral, but due to podcasts and Web presences we get response to our productions long after they've aired.”

However, several said that sometimes it was also more difficult to reach their audience through these platforms because the audience is not as localized and it can be more expensive to reach them. As a study participant put it, “[The] question is whether new platforms will engender the same relationship models that have led to listener/viewer support.”

In contrast, the responses from the commercial news directors about the effects of new media platforms on traditional delivery systems were mixed. Some respondents cited the increased interactivity of their content. One described his station’s efforts by saying, “We are trying to find more and more ways to establish a dialog with viewers. No one in our market is doing this in the same way. We ask viewers to talk back to us, and when their conversation gives us a new story idea that makes air, we give them credit. We are also working with a Parents’ Advisory Panel in which we ask viewers to participate. In coverage, we do e-mail blasts or we call two or three of the panel

members to solicit feedback from their point of view.” Others said that they now tailor their content for an on-demand world. In the words of one participant, “It gives us content that we otherwise wouldn't have had. We are now posting many stories to the Web before they air on TV.” Still others said that there have been changes in their newsgathering methods.

The commercial news directors were nearly unanimous that new media platforms make it easier to deliver content and to create unique content for their audiences. A smaller group thought that there were no changes resulting from the onset of new media. Just as many respondents are now concerned with making decisions on the fly and keeping an eye on content and comments generated by their viewers. One said, “There is more freedom to include material on the web. Therefore, the editor can give a wider berth to stories that are Web-only.”

With regard to the role of editor and the effects on journalism principles like fairness, balance, and objectivity, a majority of public broadcasters asserted that new media has not yet resulted in any changes to traditional values. One news director said, “There should not be a change from the current rigor. We are very concerned about this and don't know how things will change, if they do.” Another pointed out the younger age of the average Web user, saying, “We have to consider generational needs when developing new distribution models.”

Others said that they didn't know yet if there were changes, that there was more time and more people involved in the editorial process, and that there was more fact checking when it comes to preserving fairness and objectivity. A public station general manager added, "The platforms allow for more time and content development which foster a clearer understanding of complex stories. That is, as long as the content producer maintains high journalistic integrity."

Nevertheless, several respondents admitted that they were concerned about lower quality in their new media platforms, and others spoke of staffing issues caused by having to prepare material for multiple platforms. Now, "everything is more labor-intensive. This stuff doesn't just distribute itself. We need more employee hours to repurpose and produce for new media platforms and often additional hardware is needed. Many of them are resource-driven and so we look at where to allocate those resources and make value judgments about what serves the audience best." One respondent commented about the urgency of posting versus the amount of staff to do the posting: "Again, it goes back to getting it online first. Everyone wants to win. But you also want to get it right. Our system (of using multi-platform editors and content coordinators) hasn't let us down, but it's just a matter of time."

Another participant pointed out, "Just as AM radio fragmented, and then became overwhelmingly a conservative voice, new media allows individuals to simply seek out the news and opinions they like -- there is no impetus at all to seek out differing opinions

or news that contradicts one's worldview. At this juncture, I'm frankly unsure how to deal with that to ensure a truly well-informed populace.”

As one news director said, “Journalism itself is at risk if consumers aren't made to realize the stark differences between an individual reporting as a ‘blogger’ and the professional resources of a major news organization, with appropriate fact-checking, editing and a demonstrated, long-standing commitment to ethical standards.” Another noted that “Both have a place, but there should be a distinction.” Similarly, the program director of a PBS member station cited his concerns over the quality of viewer contributions: “Opening the door to opinions of viewers without journalism training is a bit tricky. The standards of journalistic integrity can sometimes be lowered. All of our submissions are currently monitored before being posted. This is time-consuming and slows down the whole process, but we believe it is a necessary step right now.”

Like the public stations, the majority of commercial respondents said that their standards of objectivity, balance, and fairness were unchanged by new media. As one news director put it, “Deadline pressure has always been with us.” This deadline pressure now includes the push to be the first to post breaking news online. A few participants did say that they saw the need for greater oversight with regard to the online material. One news director said, “People are often working faster and harder on more things, so greater care and oversight has to go into everything.” Some respondents saw greater transparency of their operations through their Web content, and one even admitted that his station was looser with confirming details, adding, “Shame on us for that.” The need

for more oversight was also cited as a quality concern, while others mentioned having to balance quality with getting the information out immediately.

New Media and Multimedia at NPR and PBS

To complement this discussion about new platforms, we also conducted several in-depth interviews via e-mail or phone with the new media executives for several PBS shows and at NPR, as well as the top executive for PBS Interactive. We did that for several reasons. First, most of the local public broadcasters acknowledge that the bulk of their programming is not locally produced, so that any variations involving new media usually come from the national programming provided by national producers and distributors such as PBS and NPR. Second, many of these executives are at the forefront of experimenting with new media and multi-media platforms, and they have a keen sense of what has worked and what has not worked and the issues associated with these new platforms.

The focus of the discussion was on the degree to which new media platforms are currently in use; plans for the future; and the impact of new media on traditional editorial standards of objectivity and balance.

From these discussions, one thing becomes abundantly clear: public television was very slow in embracing new media compared to its commercial counterparts and it continues to be cautious when it comes to experimenting. That caution is due to a couple of factors. First, public broadcasting does not have the economic pressures that have

roiled all elements of commercial media. With advertising fleeing traditional media, commercial broadcasting must find new revenue streams to support ongoing operations. To be sure, public media is also facing economic pressures given that it is largely dependent on donations from listeners and viewers as well as grants from foundations, both of which have suffered during the economic downturn. But unlike commercial media, public media has not suffered from the scarcity of advertising. Secondly, public media takes seriously its commitment to editorial standards, including objectivity and balance. Because much of the new media platforms involve experimentation with user-generated content that does not adhere to these standards, public media has approached these innovations cautiously.

“There have been some areas of innovation and change but for whatever reason, the PBS news and public affairs programs have been less aggressive than the commercial side in being experimental,” says a longtime new media executive now working for PBS. “My sense is that the PBS news and public affairs producers are more comfortable in the television realm and because of limited resources and fewer commercial pressures have not done as much as our commercial counterparts in new media. Because we are a not-for-profit, there is not the pressure to adapt or die. Our people just don’t feel the pressure to experiment.”

National Public Radio, however, has been at the forefront of experimentation. According to Dick Meyer, editorial director of digital news for National Public Radio, NPR distributes many broadcasts that it does not produce or provide Web support for, but

there is an elaborate digital component for all NPR-produced shows. Interestingly, when it comes to new media, NPR's digital distribution and supplementation of its various broadcast are organized not just by their programs, but also by topic and genre. This also means that the broadcast is not the primary organizing principle behind NPR's digital content, whether it is placed on the npr.org Web site or distributed through mobile devices, podcasts or RSS.

“Every show has a dedicated section on NPR.org that provides a rundown of the show's content and the audio; the specific additional features vary by show.” Meyer says. “Virtually all of NPR.org is available via RSS, but it is generally organized by topic not show. Podcasts also distribute a tremendous volume of radio programming, organized by both topic and show; users increasingly can also generate their own custom podcasts. “Custom podcasts are generally produced by topic or beat, not by show. All stories on NPR.org can be commented on by registered users, a kind of user interaction that is sometimes considered citizen journalism. Additionally, all shows occasionally call for listeners/users to submit citizen journalism such as photographs, videos, audio, text, data and “crowd sourcing” data to be used on the air or online. Programs also utilize “user groups” powered by our social media technology to converse with users, generally around specific news stories, regular features or special projects.”

Meyers says that all of NPR's news staff have been or will be trained in Web literacy, storytelling and multi-media so that they can better produce and distribute their journalism on multiple platforms.

Here is the breakdown of new media and multi-media for NPR's various programming:

<p><i>Morning Edition</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blog planned in '09 • User Groups • Multimedia • Occasional UGC 	<p><i>Talk of the Nation</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blog • User Groups • Multimedia • Frequent UGC 	<p><i>Weekend Edition</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blog • User Groups • Multimedia • Frequent UGC
<p><i>All Things Considered</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blog planned in '09 • User Groups • Multimedia • Occasional UGC 	<p><i>Tell Me More</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blog • User Groups • Multimedia • Regular UGC 	

PBS is a bit more complicated than NPR because there is a central PBS Web site under the purview of PBS Interactive. While this makes it simpler in terms of centrality of mission, brand consistency, and one editorial standard, some producers and executives of the various PBS programs have chafed at the structure because it does not allow the shows to operate their own sites independently. All PBS-affiliated programming must go through the central PBS Web site, making it very difficult for those programs to innovate online.

“PBS’s Web site has been in need of an overhaul for quite a while,” says Linda Winslow, executive producer of *NewsHour*. “At the moment, it is very hard for Web site visitors to even find *The NewsHour* on PBS.org and most audience research — PBS’ and ours—says 60 to 70 percent of the traffic is driven to the Web site by a search engine; once on PBS.org it doesn’t stick around very long.”

Lee Banville, editor-in-chief of The Online *NewsHour* calls the distribution of his show via PBS.org “a mixed blessing. On the one hand, the benefits of a centralized infrastructure, the collected impact on our search engine optimization and the connection to hundreds of other public broadcasters have been a huge benefit,” he says. “But with those benefits have come an array of problems. PBS has often been agonizingly slow in a medium that is unforgiving to those who stagnate. I feel one of the key problems has always been PBS has never really accepted its role online as it has in broadcasting. That is, that it is not a network, not a separate entity, but rather a hub of distribution. Many of PBS’ efforts have focused on building editorial capability or trying to develop a ‘site’ that people will come back to. There are dozens of people who work at PBS Interactive who I have no idea what they do or how they could help me. But they have not invested in infrastructure or technology to keep pace with the needs of the producers. I feel like they are trying to address these issues, but they are trying to catch up after more than a decade in the wrong direction.”

Jason Seiken, senior vice president for PBS Interactive, partially agrees with that assessment. “Fundamentally there was year after year of underinvestment in PBS

Interactive,” he says. “I certainly can vouch for the fact that there is an almost scandalous underinvestment in the infrastructure of PBS.org, which is what I discovered when I got here.” But Mr. Seiken, who joined PBS in January 2007, says that the frustration that *The NewsHour* has about the one URL policy stems from the decision of the PBS board to reduce audience confusion by having every television show refer viewers to pbs.org rather than individual Web sites.

Mr. Seiken adds that some producers do not seem to understand that they are not the only constituency: not everyone at PBS Interactive is focused on producers’ needs. Many are geared toward the needs of the various member stations, while others are attending to the needs of the most important constituency: the audience. “There’s a fundamental challenge to put 1,200 sites on one set of servers,” he says. “We are now trying to break that out to give our big producers a lot more technical freedom on how they architect their sites. It is this understandable tension and frustration that I’ve seen in any organization I’ve been in-between the need to have efficiencies brought about by standardization and the desires of producers to do things their own way.”

Despite the complaints about the Web site, *The NewsHour* is trying various new media platforms, though at a slower pace than much of its commercial competition. For example, one of *The NewsHour*’s biggest successes – when it comes to new media – is podcasts. The program draws more than 150,000 viewers per week who download on-demand versions of *The NewsHour*’s reports. This content was not originally generated for podcast distribution—it comes from the natural segmentation of the nightly broadcast.

The show is currently experimenting with producing audio reports specifically geared towards podcasts, but that experimentation has been limited. The program plans to continue on-demand as the way to access its content for the foreseeable future.

Mr. Banville also admits that *The NewsHour* has been late to blogging, particularly in terms of using various blogs as a separate platform. Like a number of traditional news outlets, producers are now using blogs as a way to cover breaking news online given that *The NewsHour* itself only runs once a day. The program recently launched two content-specific blogs—Art Beat and Business Desk. Art Beat is a traditional blog geared towards *NewsHour* viewers who enjoy its arts and culture reporting. Business Desk is a personality-driven blog run jointly by the online team and business correspondent Paul Solman. Mr. Solman interacts with viewers in a question and answer format. *The NewsHour* is considering extending this concept to some of its other reporters and correspondents.

Mr. Seiken says PBS Interactive leaves it up to the producers for the individual shows to determine what types of new media operations they want to try. The decisions about whether to have message boards and/or viewer comments on blogs are up to the individual producers. “We see our role as enablers,” he says. “We want to have the tools in place so that if the producer wants his or her reporters or editors to blog or have real time chats, then they have the tools to do that and don’t have to reinvent the wheel.”

The NewsHour is by no means alone in attempting this type of experimentation as well as worrying about unfettered citizen participation. Two other PBS news programs are also experimenting with new media: *NOW* and *Nightly Business Report*.

NOW uses various platforms, a presence on Twitter and on Facebook, as well as an occasional presence on Huffington Post. The program also has an audio podcast on iTunes as well as a video podcast. *NOW* is joining many other PBS programs in expanding to YouTube, placing a number of video clips there. At this point *NOW*'s use of podcasts and video podcasts are strictly related to the on-air show with few additions. The program does not post any raw video or raw interviews.

NOW's component on The Huffington Post is actually a blog by Joel Schwartzberg, director of new media for the program, where he touts some element of the show. He often links to the program as well as provides supplementary editorial content that *NOW* might not have had the time to cover during the broadcast. "The Web site is not a place for anything that cannot be put on air," he says. The program's Web site also avoids using user-generated content or outside video blogs. "There's a hunger out there for those people who want to be creators, but that is not something we offer," Mr. Schwartzberg says. "We've just started embedding user-generated content. We filter them before they go up. We experimented with Citizen Now, which is a unique citizen Web site. We asked people to send us their video. There are quarters doing that stuff, particularly students, but we haven't found such a groundswell of that that we can tap into it like YouTube. We are waiting for the level of citizen journalism to become more

sophisticated before we move in that direction.” That said, he adds that if someone comes up with a good video, the program will post it on its Web site, “but we are not jumping in with four feet until it gets to be more sophisticated.”

Rodney Ward, producer of the PBS program *Nightly Business Report (NBR)*, is also struggling with how to use multiple platforms to distribute programming while maintaining the program’s mission and editorial standards. *NBR* offers audio podcasts and blogs linked to the programs on its Web site and through RSS feeds. But the program has not gotten into user-generated content or citizen journalism primarily because of the fact that with shows devoted to financial journalism and the ups and downs of publicly traded companies, there is too great a danger that information could be manipulated. “People may try to influence stock prices and things of that nature,” he says. “We are a pretty cautious operation here. We haven’t stuck our toes into that. Our reporters are blogging, but we don’t go to the outside. I think everybody will tell you that they want their content on whatever platform people are using and to the extent that we can put our content out there and interact with our audience that is what we are going to try to do and guard against people trying to manipulate information. The responsibility is greater for us than for shows that involve general news and information.”

It is because the producers of these PBS programs are so concerned about journalism principles like objectivity and balance that they are being so cautious when it comes to experimenting with various new media platforms and devices. “Citizen journalism and user-generated content (UGC) remains in the experimental phase with

us,” Mr. Banville says. “We want to engage our audience, but not simply fork over editorial control to the self-selected group that comes to *The NewsHour* site. Therefore, we have only a few features built on viewer participation -- the aforementioned Business Desk and then the Insider Forum. The Insider Forum allows people to submit their question to a series of guests on a given topic. Those questions are then given to a senior correspondent who runs the interview using a mix of their own and the audience's questions. Both of these projects bring citizens into the editorial process but as a contributor, not the editor. Also, we will be beginning an author interview series that will live at Art Beat and serve as a sort of Book Club for *The NewsHour*.”

Nevertheless, Mr. Banville says that despite this conservative approach, *The NewsHour* is willing to experiment. On Election Day, in a partnership with YouTube, the program encouraged its viewers to submit video of the polling places near them and received thousands of submissions in response. With these, producers created the online Video Vote Project as well as provided segments to air during *The NewsHour* broadcast. “We continue to explore other ways of encouraging user participation, but for now have no plans for open-ended commenting on articles and stories,” he said.

Plans for the Future

Both PBS and NPR are aggressively examining how to use new media in the future to further both their brands and their commitment to high-quality journalism. According to Seiken of PBS Interactive, PBS is currently putting together a unique video portal that will be placed on the national PBS.org site but can also be picked up and

placed on the local station's site. This means that the local PBS member stations will be able to integrate their local videos with the national videos. Ultimately, it will also allow the local member stations to share their videos with both the national site and other member stations. "Eventually where we want to get to is that any of the local video can live on the national site and it would be promoted based on the audience," Mr. Seiken says. In other words, a local video can rise in prominence on the national site depending on how much the Web audience chooses to view it.

Another PBS innovation has to do with public television's unique business model. PBS.org currently has 12 million unique visitors a month. While each member station has its own budget and fundraising and pays dues to PBS, once online, the audience is directed to the national site. This makes local fundraising difficult, and raises the question of how to drive those visitors back to the local stations. To do that, PBS.org is planning to set aside a regular section of its homepage for every local station on the PBS.org homepage. That part of the homepage will promote content for a locally produced program. This new approach is based on a default localization based on the computer's IP address. So a computer user in Syracuse who clicks on PBS.org will see on that homepage information about local programming at WCNY, the PBS station in Syracuse. In theory, this will drive viewers to their local station's page and also get the audience more engaged.

In terms of engagement, PBS Interactive is also trying techniques that have been extremely successful when it comes to children. PBS has dramatically increased the

number of minutes and page use by children by offering them games and videos. Now it is trying to grow their non-children's sites using the same concepts. One success has been the new video portal. PBS Interactive has found that the average time a viewer spends watching a video to be 22 minutes. Many now watch full-length PBS programs online. Future plans will experiment with original Web content and videos.

But PBS Interactive is facing the same difficulties that commercial broadcasters are facing—a lack of resources. “There are a lot of opportunities for original Web content relating to news and public affairs,” says Seiken. “You have this unlimited news hole, but you have to have the resources to fill it.”

The NewsHour is also trying to figure out how to expand more online with the resources it has. “I think what you will see is some realignment of our content generation to fit into the way people are consuming news,” says Mr. Banville. “Not so much what kind of news we cover, but I think we will see more news generated throughout the day, serving a daytime audience online and then building up to the broadcast experience in the evening. I think the kind of news we do works well in the on-demand and exploratory nature of Internet news. Audience engagement will continue and probably deepen as we find ways of involving the viewers in our news gathering process, but that effort will always come through the lens of: is it good journalism? We will continue experiments in mobile news delivery and video for smaller screens. I think the long-fabled merging of the television and computer will continue to inch ahead, and we will be ready with on-

demand video offerings that work on your smart phone as well as on your giant LCD television.”

In addition, the producers plan some platform development with high speed Internet that could be as fundamental a change to the production systems as the Internet was to its distribution system. They are working with the Institute for Next Generation Internet⁷ to ensure that *The NewsHour* is on the cutting edge of new production and consumption trends, particularly for those with more limited computers, platforms or physical disabilities.

The NewsHour's expansion into new media and multi-platform distribution has had both positive and negative impacts. On the positive side, the program now has the type of access to the reporting and producing capabilities of all of the public television and public radio outlets at the national and local level, which it never had before. This allows public television's best-known and most widely-viewed news program to be stronger and more unique in what is still a very crowded news field, despite the recent economic downturn that has caused many commercial stations to cut back on their news coverage. But producers remain disappointed in PBS's lack of understanding of *The NewsHour*'s production cycles, needs and opportunities.

“As for reaching audience, it does make it easier to reach audiences that are missing the broadcast,” Mr. Banville says. “Those who are still at work would need to

⁷ The Institute was founded at San Francisco State University in 2005 “to provide leadership in the evolution of Next Generation Internet focusing on issues of public policy, industry collaboration, research and development and community engagement. For more information, see <http://www.cel.sfsu.edu/institute/>.

tape the program, a major commitment for a news program. Now, we can deliver that content in innumerable ways to consumers seeking it -- be it by browsing, downloading our podcast or through a content partner. The problem is the size of our competition. We now compete with *The New York Times*, the BBC, CNN, and literally millions of other outlets. We do not have the Associated Press or other wire service to rely on, so our content comes out of our team of editors and writers. So even as we can access our news consumers, so can everyone else. Therefore, developing a unique set of content that plays off of the headlines of the day, but adds the depth and analysis that *The NewsHour* is known for, is what we have focused on. But with news consumers expecting instant analysis, it has been hard to keep up and stay relevant as a one-stop news source.”

In terms of what NPR is planning for the future, Dick Meyers said it includes expanded use of blog/podcast/radio multiplatform units organized by topic or beat; expanded use of aggregation and curation of NPR content from selected external sources; expanded use of social media and social networking; expanded distribution of content on mobile devices and other new, non-radio, non-desktop based technology; enhanced on-demand capacity for content on all platforms; and expanded UGC.

In many respects, NPR and other public radio distributors are already on the cutting edge of new media and multi-media distributions. In December 2008, American Public Media (APM) created the “Public Radio Tuner”, an iPhone application that makes hundreds of public radio stations available to listeners with iPhones. APM turned over the code for the application to the Public Radio Exchange (PRX), which received a grant

from CPB and partnered with NPR, APM and Public Radio International (PRI). The Tuner quickly became the top application in the iTunes music section with nearly a million downloads.

In a March 3 interview on NPR's *All Things Considered*, Public Radio Exchange's Jake Shapiro called the Tuner a "transformative technology" because it allows listeners to tune into any public radio station:

"On my walk to work with those ear buds in Boston, or on those cold walks home when I've missed the favorite show locally, I will dial in the L.A. station to listen to, for instance, *All Things Considered* a few hours later on the East Coast," Shapiro tells NPR's Robert Siegel.

Stations commonly offer live streams of their broadcasts for Internet listening. The tuner simplifies the process, gathering them together on a handheld device.

"So you're really tuning in the local broadcast," Shapiro says. "But it's simulcast on the Internet, streamed from these different stations."

He calls the portability factor crucial. Leaving your home, "you can plug it into your car dashboard. You can listen when you're out of range of a typical radio signal or an Internet signal."

While the application can only be used with Apple products, Mr. Shapiro says the Public Radio Exchange is working on versions that can be used on other smart phones as well as creating an on-demand function.

The creation of the Public Radio Tuner is indicative of just how rapidly the technology is changing and equally, just how important it is for traditional media—both commercial and public—to adjust to this new reality. In this case, the Tuner is certainly a positive development for public broadcasting in that it increases both the size of the

audience and the ways to reach it. On the other hand, it is also a challenge to public broadcasting because it shows just how vulnerable traditional media is to new technologies that have the potential to compete for the consumer's time.

Because news consumers are getting their information from so many different sources – Twitter, blogs, social networking sites like Facebook – traditional print, radio and television are being forced to put their content where consumers can easily reach it. “NPR cannot reach news consumers without using alternate platforms,” says Mr. Meyers. “The potential is that NPR can vastly expand its audience, its mission and its impact by exploiting these new platforms – and do so in a cost-effective way. That is precisely why NPR became the first major news operation in America to introduce an open API (Application Programming Interface), a service that is especially useful in freeing and distributing NPR content to member stations.”

Impact on Editorial Standards

This is good news for NPR specifically and all of public broadcasting in general. That is because public broadcasting's reach is growing with content being distributed online and via podcasts, iTunes and other mobile devices. But, what does this mean in terms of editorial standards, particularly when it comes to issues of objectivity and balance?

When NPR allows its content to be broadcast on a partisan political site, critics can take aim at NPR. Likewise, if PBS were to link to a blog from one of its online

postings and the blogger happens to have a partisan point of view, will viewers consider that blog to have the imprimatur of PBS? PBS Interactive's Seiken says information from focus groups indicates that the audience is pretty savvy about linking. The key, he says, is proper labeling. If anything, one of the central problems on the Web is the failure to differentiate between a news piece and an opinion piece. This again has to do with labeling. Mr. Seiken is also not concerned about the editorial standards on the PBS site: each program's homepage is run by the same producers that run the broadcasts, so he is confident that they adhere to editorial standards.

NPR's Mr. Meyers says the move to the Web has not yet profoundly affected how the organization's radio content is produced and edited. Most of what has been done digitally has been additive to radio. Increasingly, radio personnel are participating in converting or distributing their reporting for use on other platforms. He says this has not yet put any major strains on NPR's traditional ability to exert its considerable quality control on all levels, with vigorous editing and executive oversight.

Mr. Meyers also says this is an opportunity for NPR reporters, producers and editors to share a much higher percentage of their work product with the public because of digital platforms. The public also has greater input into programming and a louder voice. NPR is more transparent and can now tell the stories that would be difficult to tell solely on the radio. NPR's content is more available, better archived and more permanent than ever before.

New media and multi-media certainly help with the transparency issue, which has been a major complaint about journalism in general and public broadcasting in particular. For example, one of the major critiques is that journalists show bias by picking and choosing information that they use in a controversial news story (or picking and choosing quotes out of context from an extensive interview). The beauty of these new platforms is that journalists can provide the original source materials in their entirety or provide a lengthy interview in its entirety so that the public will be aware of the editorial decisions that are being made.

New media “demands transparency and accountability and puts you much more in touch with the audience,” says Seiken. “You can make reporters, editors and producers directly available to the public. Maybe accuracy has even been helped a bit because you are more accountable. If you are not balanced or accurate you get called out pretty quickly from the audience or bloggers.”

The potential downside of this opportunity is that a rush to provide this additional information online might also lead to a reduction in the editorial standards that have been vigorously enforced for any news and information that is ultimately broadcast. So far, Mr. Meyers says this has not been a problem because editorial standards, values and priorities have changed very little when it comes to providing these different products in a multi-platform environment. “The pace of editorial decision-making has not been greatly affected simply because NPR has always had a hard news operation geared to producing the next up hourly report,” he says. “The Digital News division is

physically and culturally integrated with the legacy newsroom and shares the unique fundamental news standards of NPR's broadcast operation: non-commercial, non-tabloid, balanced, conservative and careful factual verification. Especially compared to commercial broadcast operations, NPR builds in substantial editorial protection into the online production process as it does in the broadcast process."

So, what about the journalism values of objectivity, balance, fairness, accuracy, transparency and independence when it comes to these new platforms? This question was put to all those in charge of new media at the various public media outlets.

According to NPR's Mr. Meyers:

We believe that our valuations of 'objectivity, balance, fairness, accuracy' do not change in a multi-platform, new media environment. Indeed, our quiver is far larger in serving the goal of "balance" when you add online in the mix – stories can be longer, with more voices, more sidebars and there are many more alternative ways to bring in different perspectives.

He says that transparency has been realized more successfully online than just by being on the radio. NPR ombudsman Alicia Shepherd, like her PBS counterpart, Michael Getler, has an online blog that includes an archive of all the previous ombudsmen's columns.⁸ There are also blogs from newsroom staff where they discuss editorial issues and challenges that would not have been made public earlier. Online corrections are far easier to implement and put into perspective. Moreover, it is much easier for listeners or users to weigh in.

⁸ However, it should be noted that Ms. Shepherd's columns rarely deal with anything posted online. She generally focuses on issues that have been broadcast on the radio or that deal with conflicts of interest.

NOW's Mr. Schwartzberg says, "the standards are the same. We are as objective online as we are on the television show. We go after the truth and we report it. The medium of the Web allows us to do other things that broadcast cannot." One of those online add-ons is an interactive debate between two people with differing viewpoints. The program gives its debaters a series of questions, each respondent getting about 200 words to answer so the Web consumer can click on the opposing points of view. At this point the answers are all text, but Mr. Schwartzberg hopes to make it more audio/visual in the future.⁹

Nightly Business Report's Ward says that the same principles that dictate objectivity and balance over the airwaves also apply to the Web site. He says their broadcasts always try to present both sides of an issue and if there are more than two sides, then to present the various points of views. However, unlike some news organizations, there is no attempt to balance each individual show. "We try to achieve balance in terms of the overall coverage," he says.

One of the major criticisms of public broadcasting is that, on any given day, a particular news report might not be considered objective or balanced. For example, NPR might report from Gaza about the plight of those living there. Pro-Israeli groups then complain that the report does not give the Israeli point of view. To that, NPR responds that a report from Tel Aviv ran the previous day. The beauty of new media is that NPR now has the capacity to stream both of those reports online and to refer listeners there for

⁹ See, for example, the interactive debate on Sarah Palin's candidacy for vice president between Michele Bachmann and Gloria Feldt at http://www.pbs.org/now/shows/436/debate_revised.html.

the full story. However, some programs, like the *Nightly Business Report*, do not offer access to older episodes. “We don’t have a full archive with everything that we have ever done,” he says. “It’s certainly possible, but you get into the cost and other issues with regard to doing that.”

NBR does use its Web site to present longer interviews to its audience. For example, a 20-minute interview with Warren Buffett will be shown in full online, while only eight or nine minutes will be excerpted for the program. Mr. Ward says *NBR* does not edit the interview it posts online. For *NBR*, the Web is simply a way to offer more content than can be provided in a 26-minute, 46-second show. “Eventually we may be at the point that rather than the broadcast driving the Web content, the content from the Web will drive the broadcast,” he says. “When that will happen, I don’t know. And what that means in terms of the amount of resources I have, I don’t know. From a resource standpoint could I hire additional reporters so that we could have more content available from the Web site? Then you get into the whole business question of whether you can create a business model to support that.”

EDITORIAL STANDARDS AND ETHICS IN NEW MEDIA AND MULTI-PLATFORM DISTRIBUTION

New media platforms present unique challenges to all media, not just public broadcasting; they also affect the core values of public broadcasting and the principles of

objectivity and balance. In today's journalism, reporters and some editors are expected to blog and Twitter. Do these informal channels, when used to deliver news updates or analysis, cross an ethical line? Should reporters render their opinions on topics and issues they cover? And what about user-generated content? Should news organizations censor comments posted on their Web site? What if the comments are unfair, libelous, or obscene? Should these forums allow anonymous comments or should all the comments be signed, like letters to the editor or letters to a broadcast news operation? What about revealing any conflicts of interest that citizen journalists might hold?

A number of groups have tried to codify such ethical standards when it comes to new media. In 2006, the Poynter Institute hosted an online journalism ethics conference. Among the conclusions that came out of that conference:

- Online journalism has the opportunity to serve audiences in new and important ways by continuing the journalists' traditional role as a watchdog.
- Journalists should embrace the opportunity to build new business models online but basic values of truth, community and democracy must also endure.
- Written ethical guidelines that embrace those values are essential. These guidelines should be subject to periodic revision and should apply not just to journalists, but to the act of journalism, which includes citizen participation.

- Transparency is the key and a necessary ingredient to describe the nature of the relationship between the journalist, the news organization and the audience. However, transparency must also be linked to accountability.
- The novelty of online tools and limited resources must not be used as excuses for failing to live up to basic journalistic principles and values.

Despite the growth of online journalism and a major move by traditional media, including public broadcasting, to go online via new media and multi-media platforms, public broadcasters have not adopted these guidelines. The Poynter conference also developed a list of values for online content:

- Online journalists should honor the principle of independence. They should avoid conflicts of interest and avoid taking gifts or other things of value that might compromise that independence.
- To protect that independence and avoid such conflicts of interest, there also must be a principle of transparency so that readers and viewers have full access to decision-making.
- News and opinion should be clearly labeled and each should be consistently presented.
- New media and multi-platforms can allow for differences in tone and presentation. However, those differences must remain consistent with the editorial principles of the news organization.
- These editorial principles and values must apply across all content and platforms.

Throughout the interviews conducted for this White Paper, not one local or national public broadcaster referred to special editorial standards for their new media operations. Instead, they unanimously stated that the same editorial principles governed their online as well as their on-air operations. Several cited the editorial standards adopted by the SPJ as their guiding force.¹⁰ Yet despite the growing presence of citizen journalists and user-generated content, neither mainstream nor public broadcasters have adopted a code of ethics to deal exclusively with online content. This is particularly true when it comes to the issue of transparency, one of the real advantages that new media has over traditional media. Because of time or space constraints, traditional media cannot usually offer its readers, listeners or viewers the type of depth and context that is now available with the unlimited nature of online media. For example, a story on the debate over health care reform generally gives both sides to the controversy. But online, the actual proposed bills—no matter how lengthy – can now be posted. This enables the public to view original source material without having to go through the journalistic filter.

Further, both Winslow and Banfield of *The NewsHour* say the role of the editor has not changed when it comes to new distribution models. “I can’t think of any reason the role of editor and editorial judgments should change in a reputable news-gathering organization like *The NewsHour*,” Ms. Winslow said. “Our mission hasn’t changed. We simply have more ways to distribute straight, unbiased news and news analysis to people

¹⁰ See <http://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp> for the Society of Professional Journalists’s code of ethics.

who want that sort of thing.” Mr. Banville states that “the role of the editor is more important now, but the basis by which we make an editorial decision has not changed at all. We now must face the same editorial challenges as a CNN or MSNBC since we are on all the time we can publish news at any time. Therefore, we must balance the need for speed with the editorial standards of quality and fairness that *The NewsHour* is known for. Like with the broadcast, there are thousands of little decisions that could test those judgments, but now instead of guest selection, we can add who we link to, how we pair archival stories with the current news, headlines and photos to the mix.”

In the earlier section of this Paper, NPR’s Meyers discussed some of the problems with objectivity and balance when it came to listener comments, which he compared to the situation of screening callers to a radio talk show. Both Winslow and Banville say the advantages of online and multi-media content in terms of the values of objectivity and balance far outweigh the problems. “I think the unlimited time provided by *The Online NewsHour* means we can augment our on-air reporting with more detail, more examples, more transparency regarding sources, etc.” said Ms. Winslow. “To that extent, the online platform makes it possible to enhance the viewers’ experience. But there’s no reason it should affect our objectivity, balance, fairness, accuracy, transparency and independence. We still edit and oversee everything that goes on our Web site.”

Banville notes that, if anything, these new media and multi-media opportunities will allow public broadcasting journalists to be more transparent, objective and balanced, because they force journalists to put the sources—both people and documents—out so the

public can see how a story was composed. Viewers are now be able to link to full interviews, complete documents or complete congressional testimony and see for themselves whether the report broadcast was a fair and accurate rendition of the information available to the reporter. “This, I believe, builds trust with the viewer and further confirms our underlying philosophy that we will expose people to a multitude of viewpoints and information and then they need to make their own minds up,” he says.

Still, new media and multi-platform distribution also pose increased challenges. One avenue NPR has tried to pursue is to bring content from outside NPR to NPR’s Web site. While that will bring additional news and information to NPR consumers, it is not without risk. The type of vetting and fact-checking that is one of the hallmarks of NPR’s operations cannot be done with outside content. Likewise, NPR content is also included on or linked to Web sites that do not meet NPR’s approval, yet there is little that can be done about that. This causes both tensions and challenges.

“Clearly, UGC provides unique challenges,” says NPR’s Meyers. “So far NPR has been very careful and we will continue to err on the side of caution. There are many areas where users can contribute and comment without getting into bread-and-butter factual reporting.”

In Boston, one well-known public broadcaster has been wrestling with many of these issues for nearly a decade and ultimately decided that it should not have a separate set of standards and values for its online operations. PBS member station WGBH in

Boston produces several national programs that are distributed on PBS as well as producing several local news and public affairs programs. WGBH is also quite active online and created its own Web code manual back in 2001. This 31-page manual included, among other things, “rules to ensure the accuracy, fairness and authenticity of what we publish on our Web sites. Also included are ethical standards that should guide our professional behavior.”

According to Ronald LaRussa, director of WGBH Interactive, this Web code was developed to ensure that those overseeing the online elements had some guidance. Although these policies were revised in 2006 they were never formally published. Mr. LaRussa said WGBH has since concluded that it no longer needs a separate Web code to govern online news and information. “Most recently we have found that with interactive media platforms so ubiquitous they do not require a separate editorial standard,” he says. “The same high standards we have always applied to broadcast apply across the board to whatever platform we are dealing with.”

Editorial Standards for Bloggers¹¹

Despite what is a clear, conscientious effort by both NPR and the various news and public affairs programs on PBS to translate objectivity and balance standards online, interviews with more than a dozen local and national bloggers for public broadcasters indicate that there is no real training regarding editorial standards.

¹¹ Marc Peters, an undergraduate student at the Newhouse School, conducted more than two dozen interviews with bloggers and news directors at public broadcasting outlets.

For example, Tom Regan was hired by NPR to write the NPR News Blog, a national blog that was not tied to any specific NPR on-air programming even though it did cover a variety of topics that were reported on many of NPR's shows and Mr. Regan did share his reporting with on-air personnel.

The blog launched in 2007 and shut down in May 2008. Mr. Regan said he was not given any editorial guidelines pertaining to content or format when the blog was launched but eventually, the NPR politics editor did provide Mr. Regan with content to use in the blog. Mr. Regan says issues of objectivity and balance were never a problem because he would cite opinions from the various sides of an issue and post links to those sides. He also screened comments on the blog and approved what would be posted. "One of the things we discovered is that a general interest news blog doesn't work on the Web," he said. "It works if you are a prominent name like Robert Siegel or Michelle Norris (hosts of NPR's *All Things Considered*). They aren't coming to the blog to read what Tom Regan has to say."

Another problem with his blog, Mr. Regan said, is that it never featured his opinion. He was allowed to highlight the opinions of others, but not his own. "We care a lot about standards at NPR, but often that means working against what makes other blogs popular. Blogging for a media organization is not like blogging for yourself. You represent a brand. Anyone can have a personal blog, but at NPR people have to have a reporting background."

Likewise, when PBS decided to start its blog to examine the effect of new media on society and culture, it did not give a set of editorial guidelines to its blogger, Mark Glaser. Glaser, an independent producer of content, simply received technical specifications from PBS on how the site should be built. The resulting blog, MediaShift, is its own entity, partially funded by PBS and partially by the Knight Foundation. The blog features both commentary on news and original reporting, with the longer sections of original reporting edited by PBS producers, Glaser said. “They want it to be similar to what you would see on PBS. They want it to be family friendly. I once did a blog about Google changing its search algorithm and happened to link to some blogs that included blogs that while they were not porn, had a sexual focus. I had to take those out. It caused controversy among some of my readers. They don’t look at everything ahead of time so it’s hard to tell what can go through and what can’t.”

Many member stations that use bloggers also have no written editorial standards. For example, WBUR-Boston operates a number of blogs including one on health called Commonhealth, moderated by healthcare reporter Martha Beginger. Healthcare professionals and experts contribute original editorial material, and features include summaries of health-related news stories from outside sources.

“Contributing bloggers are allowed to editorialize,” said Sam Fleming, WBUR managing director of news and programs. “However, in the same way we wouldn’t let those comments on our air without identifying it as opinion, we make it clear that the posts are the author’s point of view.” He maintains that the new media atmosphere is too

fluid right now for hard guidelines. “We try to give them slightly more latitude, but we cannot allow people to write whatever they want,” he said. “It’s written as a commentary. We edit for grammar. We edit for length. If there is anything inappropriate or personal we will take it out. We don’t treat them with the same standards as reporters.”

In more than a dozen interviews with both bloggers and news directors, not one said that they had established specific editorial guidelines for online media, or style manuals for bloggers or blog moderators. Most, like KPBS online content producer Nathan Gibbs, said he uses traditional reporting standards for their online media. Gibbs, who oversees copy and content editing for the station’s blogs points out “[o]ur bloggers have been writing copy for broadcast and we know them. They all have 10 to 30 years experience. They are tried and tested. We’ve lightened our editing a bit because of that.”

WBUR’s Sam Fleming says the staff will moderate, monitor and even edit blog posts. While contributing bloggers are allowed to editorialize, the station makes it clear that the posts are the author’s point of view. “We have not written a guidebook,” Mr. Fleming says. “Online media is so fluid right now, we are just trying to figure it out. We cannot allow posts if they aren’t moderated. We can’t allow people to write whatever they want.”

Beyond standards that various public broadcasters have developed for their bloggers, other organizations have also attempted to provide basic guidelines. For

example, the Media Bloggers Association was founded in 2004 to give guidance and legal advice to a new breed of citizen journalists. The association also developed a statement of principles and a set of standards, which include:

- **Honesty, fairness and accuracy:** State what you know and how you know it. Use links to supporting documents on the web wherever possible; credit sources and link to other bloggers. Distinguish fact from rumor and speculation. Be intellectually honest when expressing opinion. Don't plagiarize or pass off others' work as your own. Act responsibly and with personal integrity.
- **Transparency:** Clearly disclose conflicts of interest including personal relationships, financial considerations or anything else that might influence or appear to influence your independence and integrity. If you accept payments from advertisers or sponsors, clearly demarcate advertorial from editorial content.
- **Accountability and trust:** Use your own name and offer a means for readers to communicate with you. Engage your readers and trust them to form their own judgments and conclusions. Correct your mistakes promptly using strikethroughs or editor's notes.
- **Respect for the privacy of private citizens:** Private individuals may not want photographs, videos or information about them made available to a global audience, even if they're in a public space. Use your judgment, and use special sensitivity when dealing with children and inexperienced sources or subjects.

The Association goes on to discourage anonymous blogging, contending that bloggers should own their words. As such, the group refuses to accept anonymous or pseudonymous bloggers, though it says it does value anonymous speech and so might make an exception on a case-by-case basis.

Conclusions

There is no question that new media has led to a vast upheaval of traditional media. All forms of traditional media are attempting to come to grips with new revenue models and new ways that the public obtains news and information. Commercial media outlets have aggressively gone to the Web because their survival depends upon it. Public media has been slower to experiment with multi-media platforms because of the not-for-profit status as well as editorial fears.

The decision by the board of PBS to have a one URL policy has frequently frustrated the producers of various PBS programs. Nevertheless, that appears to be changing¹². PBS Interactive has agreed to an experiment with *NewsHour* to allow it to send its viewers to NewsHour.org rather than PBS.org.

Clearly, the growth of new media has been both a challenge and an opportunity for public broadcasting. The opportunity comes because of the widening of the audience

¹² As of the submission date of this Paper: November 10, 2009.

and the ability to do more things. Public broadcasting is now able to reach more people than it ever could have predicted a mere decade ago. Between podcasts and supplementary material placed on the Web, news and public affairs programming have a much fuller and more vibrant presence. By presenting complete interviews and source materials online to supplement the information being aired, public broadcasting has another important avenue to help fulfill its editorial mission of objectivity and balance. Those who complain of bias or out-of-context selection of quotes or information now can access a complete interview and make their arguments. As PBS Interactive's Jason Seiken notes, this increased transparency and accountability makes public broadcasting more accountable.

However, the opportunities presented by new media also come with challenges and dangers, particularly when it comes to editorial standards. There is a Wild West aspect to new media – most often in terms of user-generated content – that can be troubling. One need only go to a handful of Web sites of traditional news organizations to see the disconnect. These news organizations often have their carefully reported and written content presented online, but those pieces are generally followed by open forums that contain posts from anonymous contributors that are often profane, libelous, or deeply offensive. That is one reason public broadcasting outlets are proceeding much more cautiously in the area of new media and multi-media platforms.

At this point it appears that public broadcasting is striking the correct balance between the need to use these growing new media opportunities and the understanding of

the dangers to editorial standards that online content is not vetted as carefully as on-air programming. With that in mind, here are several suggestions that public broadcasting should consider as it moves forward into more new media applications.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In conducting the research for this White Paper, it is clear that most public broadcasters are aware of both the journalistic and economic challenges that the growth of new media and multi-media platforms have presented to their traditional broadcasting operations. It is also clear that they recognize how editorial standards, particularly issues of balance and objectivity, need to be dealt with in different ways when it comes to the Internet.

1. **Transparency:** The watchword of all good journalism is to give the public insights into how and why stories are chosen. Most complaints about bias and unfairness come about because media critics believe that the information presented is one-side or lacks context. To refute such criticism, a media organization should be willing to lay out the sources of its information as well as why some information was chosen to be included and other bits were left out. The beauty of new media and multi-media platforms is that it makes transparency so much easier. Full interviews can be posted online; documents used in stories can be posted in their entirety; multiple viewpoints that cannot

be included in a broadcast story because of time constraints can be included online.

2. **Disclosure:** The twin of transparency is disclosure. Another complaint from media critics is that sources of information are biased or have conflicts of interest. Frequently, that is true since virtually anyone interviewed as a point of view or a job that calls into question his or her objectivity. In a broadcast report, there is not time to list a speaker's full resume. That is not the case online. Public media should use their online presence to give a complete rundown of everyone they interview for a piece.

3. **Standards:** All media organizations should have a set of ethics, guidelines or procedures. These guidelines should be prominently displayed online and when critics accuse the organization of violating their own guidelines or editorial standards, the organizations should be ready and willing to engage in a dialogue about that.

4. **Ombudsmen:** When it comes to best practices for objectivity and balance, employing an ombudsman is probably the top activity that any news organization can engage in since an ombudsman serves as both a safety valve and as a liaison between the public and the newsroom. However, most ombudsmen tend to concern themselves solely with what is broadcast. In the new world of new media, an ombudsman must also examine the other

platforms used by the news organization. If that is too much work for one person to do then the organization should consider hiring a separate, online ombudsman.

5. **Clarity of purpose:** Some news organizations use their online presence as simply a brand extension. Others use it to supplement their broadcast operations. Still others use it as a completely separate news operation. There is no right or wrong way to use these new platforms, but each organization needs to clearly state the purpose and uses of the platforms it is using.
6. **Clearly marked news/advocacy:** The corollary to recommendation number 5, there should be no confusion with the viewer about whether they are looking at news or opinion/commentary or advertising. Each should be clearly identified.
7. **Urgency vs. correctness:** Traditional news operations edit before they print or broadcast. But the immediacy and timeliness of much of the online world means items must be posted immediately. Most traditional news operations would still prefer to edit stories, videos, interviews, etc. before they appear online. This has placed them at a competitive disadvantage given various resource constraints. Now some of these news organizations have allowed their journalists to post immediately—before any editing. The editors then examine what is posted at a later time and change or delete anything that proves problematic. Such a change places tremendous responsibilities on the

journalist who posts without supervision. Whatever the news organization decides, there must be clear standards as to what is allowed and what is not.

8. **The question of anonymity:** The bane of many news organizations are the forums, message boards, or user-generated content that accompanies the reports provided by the news organization. Anyone who has thoroughly read some of these posts can readily see that they are often filled with profanity or libel. Some news organizations monitor such remarks and take down anything deemed inappropriate. Regardless, any semblance of objectivity and balance is sorely lacking from most of these forums. However, one solution is not to allow anonymous postings. Newspapers do not allow anonymous letters to the editors, so why should online sites allow anonymous comments? Still, the give and take of the Web does seem to provide for such spirited debate. One possible solution: have separate comment areas—one for signed discussions and one for anonymous postings.

Appendix A: New media and multi-platform definitions

Blog: Short for “weblog”, an online personal journal. One who writes a blog is a **blogger**. It is often a Web site that can easily be updated by its owner.

Citizen journalism: Voluntary public participation in the journalistic process. Its concept is that non-journalist are often witnesses to or knowledgeable about important, newsworthy events and they can bring that knowledge to the newsgathering process.

Crowd sourcing: Having work once performed by professional journalists now being done by a group of observers or participants. This often means using video or observations from attendees or participants at an event.

Forums or message boards: The ability for Web site users to post and respond to others, thereby creating a running dialogue on any given topic.

Hypertext Markup Language (HTML): The primary computer language used to create documents on the Internet. It is the standard markup language used to denote various online links, headings and paragraphs with interactive forms.

Hits: When specific elements on online page are accessed.

Mashup: Combining multiple elements over and over and hence creating new content. One example would be to use city crime data to develop a map that shows where crime happens in a city and the type of crime at each location.

Metadata: Commonly described as data about data, it is a description of the data set that includes who collected it; what format it is in; and what it is.

Narrowcast : To aim a program or programming at a specific, limited audience or sales market.

News aggregator: A Web site or blog that collects news stories and/or video from various media outlets and online news sources on a specific topic. The Romenesko blog on Poynter.org is the preeminent news aggregator for anything having to do with the state of the news media and journalism.

Page views: When an individual screen on an online site is accessed.

Podcast: (combines iPod with broadcast): A Web-based audio broadcast via a format accessed by subscription over the Internet. A **video podcast** adds a video element to the feed.

Really Simple Syndication (RSS): Also known as Rich Site Summary, a format for delivering regularly changing web content. It allows consumers to receive timely updates

of news and information of interest to them. Many news-related sites, weblogs and other online publishers syndicate their content as an **RSS Feed** to whoever wants it.

Search Engine Optimization (SEO): An Internet marketing strategy, it is the process of improving the volume and quality of Web traffic to a specific Web site via a search engine like Google.

Social media: Web sites that also function as news portals and allow users to rank their favorite stories or content from media sites. Among the more popular ones are Reddit, Digg and NewsVine.

Social networking site: Web sites that allow users to build online communities with other people of similar interest and activities. Users create their own pages and content. The two most popular are Facebook and MySpace.

Tags or tagging: Wherever there are key words in the copy, tags are appended. It is an Internet-based method of categorizing information.

Twitter: A Web-based mode of communication via the exchange of messages no more than 140 characters in length, often sent by text message from cell phones or through the Twitter Web site. This is sometimes called microblogging. Twitter has itself created its own jargon, which includes tweets, which are posts on Twitter by Twitterers.

Uniform Resource Locator (URL): Often referred to as a Web address, this is the actual link placed in the browser that enables the Internet user to find a specific Web site.

User-Generated Content (UGC): Various kinds of media content available for the public but produced by the end-users, oftentimes in forums or message boards.

Visit: To access a Web site

Vlog: A blog that incorporates video, also known as a video podcast.

Web 2.0: The social Web that involves and connects users in multiple ways. This often refers to newer Internet technologies that allow increased interactivity.

Webcast: A media file whose content can be streamed and broadcast live over the Internet.

Wiki: A user-generated and edited site designed to enable anyone with access to contribute or edit content. It is derived from Wikipedia, a free encyclopedia built using Wiki software

Appendix B: Questions asked via the online Survey Monkey instrument*

- List the news and public affairs programs you produce or distribute to your audience.
- How are those specific programs supplemented by various new media and multimedia platforms (e.g. blogs, podcasts, narrowcasting user-generated content, citizen journalism, RSS, etc.)?
- What types of new media and multimedia platforms are you planning over the next decade?
- What has been the effect of these new media platforms on your traditional distribution (radio/television)? Specifically, how do these affect how news and public affairs programming is developed and aired?
- Do these platforms make it easier or harder for public broadcasters to reach listeners and viewers and to deliver a unique product?
- How does the role of editor and editorial judgments change when it comes to these new distribution models?
- How are journalism qualities of objectivity, balance, fairness, accuracy, transparency, and independence affected by these new media platforms?
- Are there any quality-related concerns when it comes to news distribution on new media platforms as opposed to your traditional distribution? What are those concerns and how are they being dealt with?

*These survey results were compiled and analyzed by David Crider, a Media Studies student at the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University.