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FCC Workshop on Public and Noncommercial Media in the Digital Era

Panel Discussion III: New Platforms, Approaches and Structures

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Thank you Ellen Goodman, Steve Waldman, and Chairman Genachowski, for inviting me to weigh in on these issues. I am a big believer in the need for public media in the digital era, and appreciate the Commission elevating this discussion at a time of great ferment in media and journalism.

So who needs public broadcasting in the age of YouTube?

“You” = public and “Tube” = broadcasting, right? Every day thousands of videos are posted to YouTube, reaching millions of people across every conceivable interest. Anyone can create, broadcast, and distribute. It’s open, democratic, participatory, exploding with free expression.

Should we declare victory and hand back the spectrum?

In the noncommercial realm, one could argue that the two most effective “public media” entities on the web today are not PBS and NPR, but Wikipedia and Mozilla – the maker of the popular Firefox browser.

Can we claim them as public media and add their impact to ours?

Public broadcasting can become the vital center of a new public media, but only if it expands to include other public service sources; if it engages people far beyond its current core audiences; if it invests in digital-first infrastructure, content and services; and if it creates value as a network of networks.

These are the principles we embrace at PRX – the Public Radio Exchange.

PRX is public media’s “born-digital” network – an online distribution service connecting local stations, independent producers, and the public. Launched in 2003 in the pre-dawn of the Web 2.0 movement, PRX was an early adopter of practices that drive innovation on the Internet now: open platforms, participation, “long tail”

distribution, search and recommendation, and the essential role of curating amidst content abundance.

PRX started as a collaboration between the Station Resource Group and independent producer Jay Allison. Public investments by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and the National Endowment for the Arts helped leverage private support from Ford, MacArthur and other Foundations.

PRX's goal is to open up public radio to new diverse voices; create an accessible archive; develop new distribution pathways to broadcast and beyond; and invite listeners to curate, comment, or become producers themselves. Ultimately, the goal is to connect important and compelling stories to communities.

The result is an online marketplace – a kind of eBay for public radio content: over 40,000 programs have been distributed through PRX.org, reaching millions of listeners. 600 stations, 2,200 producers, and nearly 100,000 listeners use the site, and PRX has channeled over \$1,000,000 in royalties to producers and stations.

PRX is an innovation lab for content and technology, but as an entrepreneurial nonprofit we also focus on business models for new platforms.

This is a hybrid approach we need more of in public media: organizations that are native to the networked environment, infused with public service values, and employing market-based means towards mission-based ends.

When Apple launched the iPhone App Store in 2008, PRX lead a collaboration with NPR, APM and PRI to develop the Public Radio Player – a free iPhone app that aggregates hundreds of local station streams – including community and LPFM stations – and thousands of on-demand programs.

The Player has been downloaded over 2.5 million times, reaching new listeners and creating new patterns of use. An Android version is in the works, and our goal is to open source the code for both.

I would like to point out to the Commission that Apple prohibits donations to nonprofits through iTunes and the iPhone, effectively blocking a major source of voluntary support for public media.

I'll conclude with some observations:

- First: engineers and producers helped shape the sound and structure of public broadcasting. Today we need web developers and designers, but face a worrisome talent gap.
- Second: strong local stations are essential community institutions, and are becoming multimedia hubs for local engagement. But they are not the only vehicles for public investment in public media. We also need new organizations with digital DNA.

- Third: the “dark arts” of the commercial web like Search Engine Optimization and Social Media Marketing are ripe for reinvention around public service goals and values. This new space may be subverted before public media even catches up. It may also be time for a Public Media Cloud – dedicated digital capacity.

So why isn't YouTube all the public media we need? We are in a temporary alignment where emerging business models for Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and other commercial platforms seem to favor openness and social connection. But there is no guarantee that these will become or remain supportive civic spaces, or that the content deand we are starting to see the risks already.

This is true across all communications layers: the physical pipes, the code, and the content.

PRX points the way to effective public and private investments in new noncommercial media models, and support for purposeful innovation in content and technology. I would like to see public media create the next YouTube.

Thank you again for the opportunity to participate in today's workshop.