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Public service broadcasting faces economic challenges

Abstract: Public service television is funded in many countries by government grants and taxes, along with donations from NGOs and individual viewers. But with the economic downturn, the U.S. government is considering eliminating its public service TV funding altogether. But public service television is not the only medium being hurt in the economic crunch, and even commercial media are starting to look at government for help. Is there a solution? This article demonstrates that there is.

Keywords: public service television TV economy funding Internet free video

Public service broadcasting faces financial difficulties at the best of times. PSB is typically dependent on government support (though not control), non-government grants and public donations. UNESCO says:

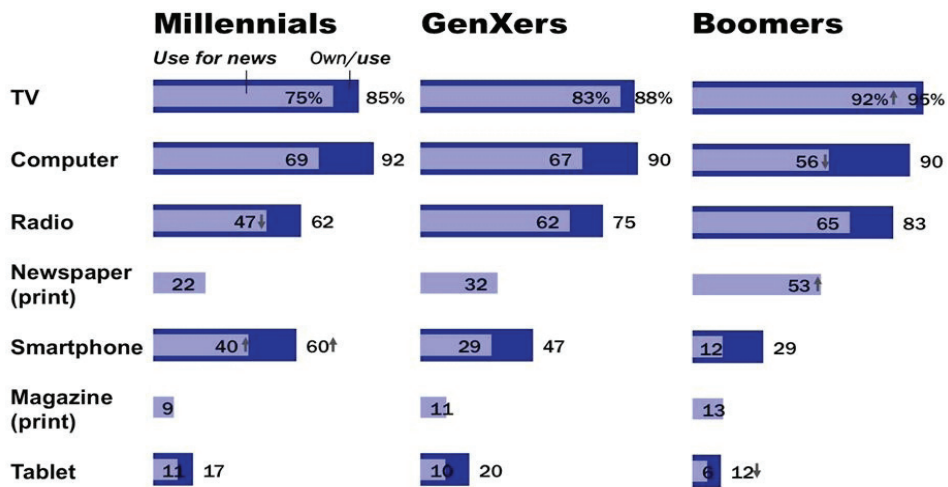
Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) is broadcasting made, financed and controlled by the public, for the public. It is neither commercial nor state-owned, free from political interference and pressure from commercial forces. Through PSB, citizens are informed, educated and also entertained. When guaranteed with pluralism, programming diversity, editorial independence, appropriate funding, accountability and transparency, public service broadcasting can serve as a cornerstone of democracy.

In the United States most public service stations are owned by universities and by non-profit, non-government organizations. Without support from paid advertising, such organizations must pursue grants and donations to survive. Providing quality programming through such inconsistent funding sources has always been challenging. But current economic woes have made things even worse. The U.S., for example, has one of the most advanced systems of public service TV programming, which

has enjoyed substantial government funding in the form of grants directly to the PSB stations or to programming producers. But the U.S. is currently going \$1-\$1.7 trillion dollars deeper into debt every year trying to maintain services and spend itself out of the current quasi-recession. That's \$3,000-\$5,000 for every man, woman and child in the country, which means now that upon birth a baby inherits from the federal government \$50,000 in federal debt before he dirties his first diaper. A family of four currently shares a \$200,000 portion of the federal debt. Many American politicians believe the country's Public Broadcasting System is one of the first programs that needs to be defunded in order to reduce the growth in the federal deficit. Big Bird (a favorite character in children-oriented educational programming) must die. Public service broadcasting is facing similar financial challenges worldwide.

To be put into perspective, it must also be understood that many commercial media are also facing very difficult times – partly because of the recession but also because of the impact of the Internet. Current trends indicate we will soon witness the death of many printed publications and the transition of most others into online-only “publications” or services.

News consumption by age group

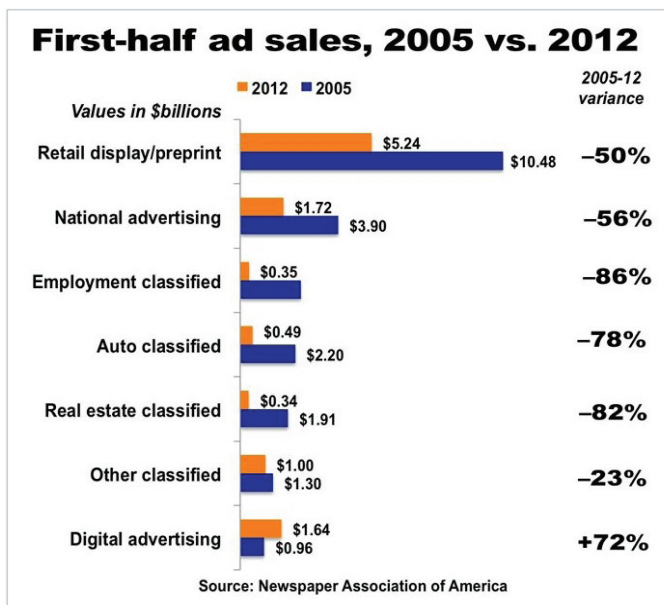


Source: New York Times Cross Platform News Consumption 2012. N=3,022.

Mutter, Alan D. "The incredible shrinking newspaper audience." Reflections of a Newsosaur (blog). <http://newsosaur.blogspot.com/>. Oct. 15, 2012.

The above chart shows how all traditional media are losing audience (and thus advertising revenues) among younger generations as they turn more to

computers, smart phones and tablets for their news and information. ²



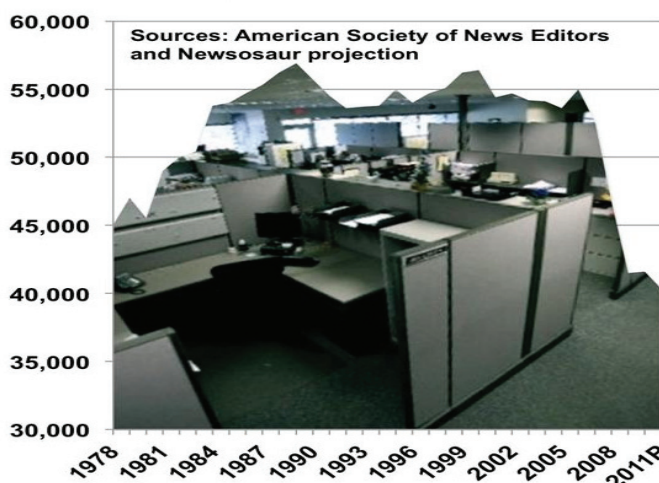
Source: Newspaper Association of America

Mutter, Alan D. "Print ads fell 25x faster than digital grew." Reflections of a Newsosaur (blog). <http://newsosaur.blogspot.com/>. Sept. 10, 2012.

The chart above, then, shows how much revenue American newspapers have lost since 2005 because of these trends. As indicated by the last item listed, the sale of digital advertising by newspapers (on their Web sites, etc.) is the only revenue source on the increase, and its growth does not come close to

making up for the losses from other revenue streams. Blogger Alan Mutter concludes: "Print advertising revenues at newspapers in the first half of this year fell 25 times faster than digital sales grew, demonstrating the febleness of the industry's response to the shifting (shifted?) media landscape."³

New low Journalism jobs at U.S. newspapers



Mutter, Alan D.
"Newspaper
job cuts surged
30% in 2011."
Reflections of a
Newsosaur
(blog).
<http://newsosaur.blogspot.com/>
m. Dec. 19,
2011.

This loss of advertising revenues has led to the lay-off of thousands of employees from the traditional media, led by the printed media. And, as shown in the above chart, the American newspaper industry has had to lay off tens of thousands of employees. Over 3,775 newspaper jobs were eliminated just in 2011, according to Erica Smith, the author of the Paper Cuts blog. Since 2007 when Smith began her running count of publishing layoffs, 39,806 newspaper jobs have been eliminated – 11% of the newspaper workforce of 360,633 reported by the Census Bureau in 2007. Considering the over 50% loss in revenues, it may be surprising that the industry has only eliminated 11% of its jobs since labor is the industry's greatest cost. However, many news organizations are also filing for bankruptcy.⁴

The greatest proportion of news employees laid off is from the newsrooms, which worries many news executives that the Golden Era of Investigative Reporting is dead and gone forever. One of the biggest players in investigative reporting has been the Washington Post. Post Vice President at Large Leonard Downie Jr. is exploring how newspapers can maintain their reporting capabilities despite the disastrous decline of revenues, and one of his options is government funding such as PBS receives, or special grants as the National Science Foundation provides scientific researchers, or special tax incentives as non-profit corporations receive. In other words, every newspaper in America may become a PBS competitor for funding.⁵

With all the economic challenges that will gradually force most printed publications to stop their presses and move entirely onto the Internet and that will later begin forcing broadcasting organizations there, as well, it seems inevitable that public service broadcasting will eventually end up primarily online. That's the bad news.

NOW THE GOOD NEWS

There is good news, too. The Internet already offers an amazing array of products that are available free of charge for use by an online public service broadcasting station. Just consider a very small portion of what's available free from YouTube. At <http://www.youtube.com/education?b=400> you can scroll through the right-hand column and see some of the bigger producers of higher-education videos. The YouTube educational videos include:

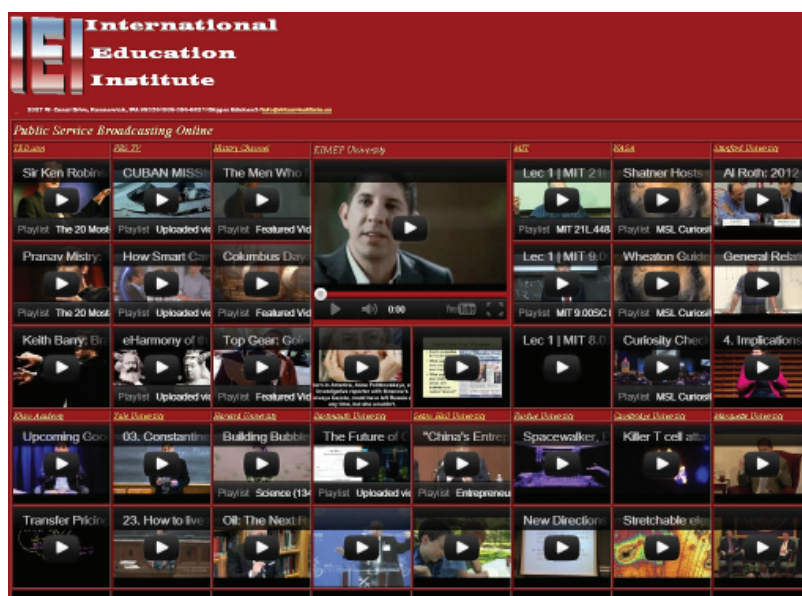
- 10,414 videos by the National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning (Indian consortium of universities)
- 9165 videos by BigThink
- 7209 videos by the Virtual University of Pakistan
- 5299 videos by PBS (U.S. Public Broadcasting System)
- 5161 videos by UCtelevision (University of California statewide system)
- 4700 videos by Google
- 4621 videos by the University of California – Berkeley

- 3768 videos by the National Geographic
- 3243 videos by Khan Academy
- 2839 videos by UCLA
- 2417 videos by MIT
- 2182 by Emory University
- 2042 videos by NASA
- 1929 by the Technion – Israel Institute of Technology
- 1665 videos by Stanford University
- 1350 by Case University
- 1250 by TED.com
- 1156 by Stanford Business
- 1138 by The Open University
- 1014 by Yale University
- 992 by the Johnson County Community College
- 985 by VOALearningEnglish
- 970 by Dartmouth
- 833 by Harvard
- 642 by Penn State University
- 540 by Michigan State University
- 533 by Seton Hall University
- 524 by the University of Southern California
- 517 by Moscow State Institute of International Relations
- 414 by Purdue University
- 483 by the College of Charleston
- 407 by Cambridge University
- 383 by the University of New South Wales
- 383 by the Research Channel
- 374 by Carnegie Mellon University
- 293 by Marquette

- 254 by the Australian National University
- And thousands of additional videos from over 400 other universities and organizations producing college-level educational resources. See http://www.youtube.com/education_channels?level=higher_education.⁶

There are similar video resources available online to address the needs of other age groups and special-interest groups. For example, on YouTube there are about 20,000 free videos for learning English as a foreign language. Even though most of these educational videos can be freely embedded onto other Web sites, to my knowledge no one has invested the resources into organizing all of this free programming into easily searchable topics and instructional levels.

For many organizations, including news organizations and public service broadcasting organizations, there will be a growing need for employees or volunteers simply to inventory and organize the resources already available. Just to demonstrate what this could look like, I have created an example at <http://Virtual-Institute.us>. It shows nearly 40 embedded videos ready to click and watch and has one-click access to directories with tens of thousands of additional public service videos. I put this together by myself in one day. What could an organization with dozens of volunteers or employees do? In addition, the featured video in the center can be changed for about \$60 a month to a live video feed. And the live video feed can be simultaneously recorded for later view on demand.



Meanwhile, one of the most amazing accomplishments of the Internet has been its ability to recruit and coordinate the activities of unpaid volunteers. YouTube itself is a prime example. Every 60 days YouTube processes and makes available more original video than the three oldest American TV networks – ABC, NBC and CBS – produced altogether in 60 years.⁷ Another great example of volunteer collaboration has been Wikipedia, which has developed an online encyclopedia with some 23 million contributed stories. Volunteers have provided the writing, the editing and even most of the technical support, with about 100,000 active contributors. It offers stories in 285 languages and achieves nearly 3 billion page views per month.⁸ An analysis by several panels of experts has concluded that the quality of content is superior to most professionally produced encyclopedias. And this online miracle was accomplished with no paid employees during the early years and only one lead software developer now.⁹

This new spirit of collaboration is now being seen in broadcast television production. Several TV stations, including Rogers TV in Toronto, Canada, are turning to volunteers to produce local news and entertainment. The Web site for Rogers TV explains¹⁰:

Volunteer Positions

EXPERIENCE THAT LASTS A LIFETIME!

You are about to embark on a rewarding partnership and join the ranks of hundreds of Canadians who volunteer with Rogers TV. As a Rogers TV volunteer you will be serving your community by informing and entertaining.

In exchange for your commitment, you will be provided with hands-on training in many aspects of television production. What you gain from this experience is entirely up to you. Whether you're looking to gain practical experience needed for further education or a career change, or to simply take part in an exciting volunteer environment, Rogers TV will provide you with a solid experience in television broadcasting. You will learn skills that will help you increase your self-confidence, your personal presentation profile and your communication abilities.

Imagine...a television station you can call home. Rogers TV is that place.

Rogers TV is committed to the value of community television, consistently delivering local alternatives to commercial broadcast television. Our sta-

tion provides a window to the community you live in and is an extremely effective vehicle for providing a voice for local diversity and expression.

Most of our programs are about you, your family, friends and neighbours. We pursue stories that matter most in your community. We share in your successes and connect you to the events that have marked your past and those that are shaping your future.

As a volunteer we ask that you be dedicated, motivated and show initiative!

We look forward to your participation in our programming and wish you all the best in this experience.

The experience of YouTube, Wikipedia and now some TV stations suggests that original high-quality video productions can be created by public service stations – online or offline – by volunteers. But the future is almost certainly online where tens of thousands of high-quality educational, informational and entertainment videos are already available free of charge. And if a concerted public service online broadcasting effort were made worldwide, collaborative success could well parallel that of Wikipedia and YouTube. Here are the steps I would suggest for an organization wishing to establish an online PSB TV station:

1) Recruit volunteers to create a database of existing, embeddable high-quality online video content appropriate to the mission of public service broadcasting. At YouTube, for example, when volunteers call up a video, they will see the title above the video, a content description below the video, and a SHARE button also below the video. If they click the SHARE button, they will first see the official URL Web address of that video and will see another button that says EMBED. If they click the EMBED button, it provides an html code that can be easily used by a Web programmer to make that video available on essentially any other Web site – including the site used by the online PSB station.

2) Also check the video source organization for credibility and for the URL Web address of that organization's online directory of videos to which your online public service TV station can refer viewers. The YouTube name for the organization's producer, for example, is typically right above the video and below the title. First is the organization, with a link to a page with information about that organization, and to the right of that button is a but-

ton that says how many videos that organization has uploaded. If volunteers click that button, they will reach a directory page for all the organization's videos. Organizations that have produced and/or uploaded hundreds or thousands of videos should be of particular interest to a PSB organization and their viewers.

3) Have the volunteers place all this information into the database –

- The name and description of each video.
- The URL source address.
- The embed code. If no embed code is available, don't bother to proceed with this video. The embed code is essential, and not all organizations allow outside embedding. Most YouTube contributors and other video sites, such as TED.com, do.
 - Some searchable key words.
 - Perhaps an estimate of the level of programming the video represents (beginning, basic, intermediate, advanced...).
 - The name of the organization that produced and/or uploaded the video.
 - The URL address for that organization's directory of videos, if available.

4) Now recruit volunteers to begin creating original video, very similarly to how Rogers TV does it in Canada. Space in this article does not allow a full description of how to create low-cost but high quality PSB videos, but teaching volunteers is not a difficult process.

5) And the cost of setting up an online PSB station can be under \$10,000. High-quality video cameras for online use are no longer expensive, and free or low-cost software is also available. Budget considerations might include:

- Computers are the biggest cost. The better the computers, the faster the work. A \$500 computer can do the job, but it can be pretty slow. How many computers an online PBS station might require would vary by goals and circumstances. One is enough to begin.
 - Flip-style cameras now cost about \$50 in America. They typically have a built-in microphone but no audio jack for an external microphone. They are excellent for close-up interviews and for background video over which volunteer video editors and place voice-over audio. And they fit in a volunteer's pocket for easy transport.
 - Larger video cameras, such as the Canon

Vixia models, cost around \$500, have good zoom capability, and have an audio jack for an external microphone. These are still small cameras that volunteers can hold in their hand, but for best results they should be attached to a tripod at an additional cost of \$30-\$50 apiece.

For software, Audacity is an excellent audio creation and editing software that is downloadable free of charge. Other software, such as the Any Video Converter, can also be downloaded free, although some low-cost programs can convert a wider range of audio and video formats. Video editing software to handle a wide range of formats (including Vixia's) can be purchased for under \$100. And Web-conferencing software, such as HotConference, will allow a PSB online station to establish a live video feed on the Web site up to 24 hours a day for just \$60 a month (<http://www.hotconference.com/members/eduken/connection.php>). And for the Web site itself, leased space on a server operated by a company like GoDaddy.com costs under \$10 a month.

So, can a fairly small organization launch an effective online PSB station? With no big difficulty or cost. A little money, some volunteers and a desire to serve. I believe this is the future of public service broadcasting.

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Кен Харви

Мемлекеттік телерадиохабарлардың экономикалық қиындықтарға ұшырауы

Көптеген елдердің мемлекеттік телевизиясы үкіметтік емес ұйымдар мен жеке телекөрсеткіштердің көмек беруімен ғана емес, сонымен қатар үкіметтік гранттардың және салықтардың нәтижесінде қаржыландырылады. Экономиканың құлдырауына байланысты америкалық үкімет бұқараға қызмет көрсетуші теледидарды қысқарту жөнінде мәселе көтеруде. Осы мәселені қалай шешуге болады? Автордың айтуы бойынша оның шешімі бар. Мақалада ол бұқараға қызмет көрсетуші өзінің веб-сайтын көрсетеді.

Түйін сөздер: телевизиялық экономика, коммуналдық қызмет көрсетуші телевизия, интернет арқылы қаржыландырушы - ақысыз бейне көрсетілім.

Кен Харви

Государственное телерадиовещание сталкивается с экономическими трудностями

Государственное телевидение финансируется во многих странах правительственными грантами и налогами, наряду с пожертвованиями от НПО и отдельных зрителей. Но из-за экономического спада американское правительство рассматривает устранение ТВ коммунального обслуживания. Есть ли решение? Статья подтверждает, что есть. Это Интернет, куда коммерческие СМИ постепенно двигаются. Автор демонстрирует это собственным типовым веб-сайтом для видео коммунального обслуживания.

Ключевые слова: телевизионная экономика, телевидение коммунального обслуживания, финансирующая интернет-бесплатное видео.