

**Using Campus Media to Mentally Position Students
for the Emerging Media Delivery Systems**

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Although student-produced campus media outlets have long existed in various forms on college and university campuses, a great variety has existed in how individual campuses have in the past implemented student media. Therefore, as traditional student media now transform to serve within the new communication frontier created by emerging delivery systems, they face the challenge of arriving at an uncertain destination starting from very divergent points of beginning.

For the purpose of this discussion, traditional student media include newspaper, yearbook, magazine, radio and television. Within each of these categories the specific implementation of student media on different campuses is shaped by a number of factors.

For instance, some traditional student media are administratively housed within a closely-related academic program such as communication, journalism, or mass communications; others are housed within academic programs less specific to media, such as within an English department; and still others are administered outside any academic program, such as a student life department. Various student media are sometimes situated under dissimilar organizational structures on the same campus: a campus newspaper might publish from within a journalism program, but the radio station on the same campus might be a “club” answering to student life. Indeed, one standard of the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications requires that institutions with an accredited academic unit “provide students with extra-curricular activities and opportunities that are relevant to the curriculum and develop their professional as well as intellectual abilities and interests” (ACEJMC, 2007, p. 48); however, ACEJMC does not require such extra-curricular activities to be housed within the accredited unit, only that the *institution* provide these opportunities. As traditional student media

increasingly converge to adapt to new delivery systems, institutions must evaluate historical organizational arrangements and remove any structural barriers that might inhibit students from participating across media platforms.

The intended purpose of an individual student medium – for the students producing material for that medium – might also vary from institution to institution, or even between media at the same institution. Some student media are intended to offer pre-professional preparation for students ultimately pursuing careers in media – often these are the student media structurally organized under an academic program and are closely aligned with the formal curriculum. Other student media are intended solely to provide participating students with a creative outlet, with no intention of providing deliberate preparation for aspiring media professionals. Student media organized within student life programs are most often intended for this second purpose, as are some media operated within an academic unit. Student media designated to enhance professional preparation have a more immediate need to embrace the emerging delivery systems in order to prepare graduates for the certain change occurring in the greater media environment. Although somewhat less urgent, even those student media that do not aspire to prepare media professionals will need to adapt to emerging delivery systems in order to remain relevant to media consumers – higher education demographics, thus the campus media audience, include a high concentration of new media early adopters.

Even the so-called traditional student media are at times characterized by their use of non-conventional delivery systems. Student “radio” stations on many campuses are not heard on over-the-air broadcast frequencies, oftentimes because of a lack of available licensed spectrum, but might make use of an unlicensed transmission, a spare channel on a cable television system, or a closed public address system. Student television stations are most often not over-the-air

broadcasts, but are usually carried on cable systems. Student television enterprises might include a regular schedule of daily or weekly programs, or might be limited to the occasional recorded or live program. Student newspapers might publish daily, weekly, biweekly or some other intermittent schedule. Long before recent discussions about media convergence, many college and university yearbooks remade themselves as periodic magazines in order to remain pertinent to contemporary readers. Existing delivery systems used by student media will certainly factor in to any transition to new distribution channels.

The new communication frontier is now in the continuing process of discovery and colonization by academics, students, and media professionals alike. The related buzzword “convergence” has many potential meanings, the complete exploration of which is far beyond the scope of this discussion; however, on its most basic level the term implies a coming together. For student media, that coming together represents crossing the boundaries which have historically separated the traditional mass communications outlets to present information and entertainment using an assortment of media. On a slightly more advanced level, convergence includes the delivery of content outside its traditional delivery platform. Here, student media are likely to port material – including repurposed versions of the same content previously produced for traditional media – to the Internet and to emergent portable electronic media. Our developing comprehension of the phenomenon also leads us to recognize an even more advanced level of convergence, where the role of the audience changes from the linear nature we have previously known, now allowing consumers to self-direct content delivery, interact, and even generate mass media content. At this heightened level student media creators must make the most radical adjustment in how they produce and manage content.

In many ways the academy is now playing catch-up with media convergence as it has been developing in the professional world, instead of being future-thinkers. Student media can provide the venue to experiment with the application of new technologies and methods of producing media content. Much of what is necessary to facilitate this pioneering effort involves changing the mindset of the student media participants.

A number of campuses in the United States have embarked on efforts to create converged media. Such efforts often begin with structural changes, such as moving parts of formerly-separate media operations into common physical workspace. Kent State University's School of Journalism and Mass Communications recently moved into a renovated building that includes a consolidated newsroom. Though the Kent State student media share physical space, respective media retain traditional organizational structures. "The converged newsroom will give student media more opportunities to work together as one news organization – that's the biggest benefit to both us and the student body," says Rachel Abbey, editor of the Fall 2007 *Daily Kent Stater*. "Being in one room, we will literally be able to sit next to one another and work on stories together" (Compton, 2008). However, merely locating print, radio, and television journalists in a joint workspace does not automatically create a "converged" newsroom.

Journalism is inherently about competition, not cooperation. A key student mindset to first strive to change is to transform the former sense of competition into one of cooperation. Further structural reforms to consider include developing an umbrella identity to unify former adversaries. An example of such a creation is "i-Comm" at Brigham Young University. "A rapidly changing industry has made necessary the birth of a new creation in the Communication Department. i-Comm, a convergence of student-led media groups, is a way for students from many academic majors to use their skills in practical and professionally modeled ways"

(Nguyen, 2007). The use of such an enveloping identity need not necessarily replace the names of traditional outlets; such a drastic implementation risks alienating staff members and audience alike. The crucial point is to create common ground and common cause. Likewise, if the respective media retain vestiges of former internal organizational structures the emotional boundaries are also likely to remain. For example, if the goal is to construct a joint news operation consideration might be given to reformation of the editorial chain of command so that one individual is responsible for story assignments for all outlets: print, broadcast, and online.

A benefit of fostering new forms of cooperation is that strengths of individual staff members can be combined in complementary ways, allowing for the more effective telling of stories. Converged media provide multiple means for storytelling. Various elements of the same story might be best told using the printed word, video, or interactive graphics. Jeff Schenck, the UCLA *Daily Bruin* editor, stresses the use of media appropriate to the story. “‘All stories are different, and it takes different media to cover them properly,’ Schenck concludes. ‘A red-carpet thing doesn’t work well in print, so we cover it in video now. The Regents approving something can’t be covered well on video, but we are doing that in print. It’s even wrong to call it a paper: It’s a news source now’” (Greenberg, 2007).

Online editions of many newspapers, including some student newspapers, have already embraced video components to supplement text versions of stories. Early examples of such efforts have been the less-than-polished creations of print journalists without formal training in videography and video editing; increased production values are obviously more likely through cooperation between traditional print and video outlets, where journalists with pertinent training produce the respective media content. Jason Brummond, the editor-in-chief of the *Daily Iowan* at the University of Iowa works with television journalists to bring video into the online edition

of the newspaper. “‘The hardest thing has been getting people to work together,’ Brummond said. ‘In newspapers, people have identified themselves as a print journalist or a broadcast journalist.... The biggest challenge is getting those people to work on the same story, go out together and cover an event’” (Pesce, 2008). Developing student buy-in can include the satisfaction gained through collaborative successes.

Fostering unity also requires the developing of respect for inherent differences between the traditional media aspects of the newly cooperative entities. Traditional print outlets such as newspapers and magazines are almost exclusively rooted in journalistic content, while the traditional electronic outlets of radio and television include combinations of journalistic and non-journalistic entertainment content. Many early convergence efforts in student media have focused primarily on journalistic content alone, which naturally leads to resistance from students principally interested in the neglected non-journalistic matter. An example of this point might be that the traditional role of a student radio station has been the presentation of music strictly as entertainment, while the traditional role of a student newspaper might have included a critical review of a newly-released music recording; the converged online outlet should not be limited to a rehashed version of the print review, but might include *both* the review and presentation of the music recording itself, or a portion thereof.

Initial forays by student media into new delivery systems are frequently limited to retransmitting content originally produced for traditional media through a new channel – most often, the Internet. Such efforts might include the cooperation across traditional media platforms discussed above, but often they do not. The student newspaper creates a Web site, branded to match the traditional print edition, which simply repeats verbatim content from the print edition. The student over-the-air radio station creates its own Web site, through which it provides basic

information describing the station and, most importantly, adds a live audio stream comprised of the same programming distributed to its broadcast transmitter. In other cases, where a broadcast frequency is not available, an Internet-only station is created that mimics the programming of a traditional student radio station. Like the student radio station, the student television station creates a Web site describing the station and providing an additional outlet for stored video files of programs previously distributed through more traditional channels. The common factor in each of these examples is that minimal effort is necessary to create an online presence.

An important mindset to address in each of these examples is students' tendency to view the online version as an afterthought – *first*, the traditional media is produced, *and then* comes the Internet version. The print edition of the newspaper is viewed as *the* product and the online edition is lagniappe; the print edition *must* be put out by deadline, but the online edition might succumb to staff fatigue and might get updated, or not – particularly if the newspaper has only a small staff. Likewise, radio and television Web sites are allowed to become woefully outdated due to the day-to-day demands and distraction of producing for the traditional outlets.

Though repurposing tradition media content to the new media can be efficient use of resources, it does not necessarily maximize the potential of the new outlets. A student newspaper Web site provides the opportunity to present timely information between printed editions or to provide in-depth coverage not possible in a space-limited print edition. A student radio station Web site could recap entire daily playlists to help audience members accurately identify music of interest, or could provide extended artist profiles too detailed to present in the related broadcast. A television Web site might provide the synopsis of episode plotlines for a student-produced serial drama. Again, by collaboratively working together student media practitioners across platforms can provide content superior to individual efforts in the traditional

media. Students must be encouraged to consider the additional potential of the new media channels, and to not view them merely as extending the reach of traditional media.

At the opposite extreme, naïveté might lead a hasty conclusion that new media outlets can or will soon supplant traditional outlets. Case in point is a recent announcement by the president of Chattanooga State Community College of the sale of the license for broadcast radio station WAWL, to be replaced with a Web-only station (Courter, March 19, 2008). The explanations for the decision ignore the fact that Internet radio is not yet as portable as broadcast radio. A cost-saving justification does not consider that streaming costs per listener do not scale the same as for broadcast stations – each additional online listener significantly increases costs, while additional broadcast listeners do not – and that an online station with an audience comparable to a broadcast counterpart would be prohibitively expensive. A cited benefit of migration to Web-only distribution is a potential for online archiving of programming – proposed in a manner specifically in violation of the federal copyright statute. The Chattanooga State president also stated, “I believe it (a digital radio mandate) is coming, but also we are dedicated to doing things right, and for a radio station that plays music that would mean going digital” (Courter, March 28, 2008), a statement that does not square with the fact that a Web-only radio station performing music will provide lesser audio quality than the predecessor analog broadcast outlet – many people mistakenly confuse “digital” Internet transmissions with “perfect copy.” The predicted demise of traditional media is, for now, premature.

The new delivery systems add legal challenges that student content producers must consider, particularly in the area of intellectual property. The Webcasting of commercially-released recorded music triggers complex statutory content requirements along with new performance royalties. Podcasts containing music are subject to copyright limitations not

applicable to either Webcasts or to over-the-air transmissions. Web sites incorporating blogs and discussion forums raise additional legal and policy issues regarding the potential editing of content.

Changes in technology initially disrupt customary ways of accomplishing tasks. Students engaged in campus media must get used to doing things differently. The best way to facilitate this type of transition is to not only provide the tools, but to also ensure that abundant training is provided in order to minimize anxiety. Students need to be made aware that at the outset the commitment of additional time will be necessary to accomplish even familiar tasks utilizing new technologies – something that proves challenging within tight student schedules – but as the learning curve eventually flattens productivity ultimately should be enhanced.

The importance to student media of convergence and the evolving delivery systems extends beyond training practitioners to work in more than one of the traditional media, but also includes preparation for storytelling in a new media form yet to be fully developed and serving audiences consuming media in new ways.

Students must be focused on the message, not on the production platform. Now it is more important than has always been the case that students need to be made to regard the technology as tools used to communicate a message. Media consumers are increasingly platform agnostic, gathering information across different media platforms. Student media practitioners must be similarly broadminded, otherwise they risk losing reader, viewer, and listener attention to competing outlets.

Emerging delivery systems are also changing the relationships between media senders and receivers, as the Facebook and YouTube generation increasingly expects to be engaged in interactive communication, including by means of consumer-produced content. Student media

producers as media consumers are themselves part of the group of most intense participants in these developments, and they should be first reminded to incorporate the experience of their personal media utilization patterns into their own decisions and secondly need to be encouraged to experiment with new forms of discourse. A panelist speaking during the University of Tennessee Student Media Convergence Week recently reiterated this point: “Benz pointed out an advantage the current generation of college students has: familiarity with the online world. Using Facebook, Flickr and YouTube is second nature to college students, which are valuable skills in the new world of online journalism” (Petrie, 2008).

As content choices increase for media consumers, student media producers must also consider how to expedite the filtering of daunting amounts of information. Conventional wisdom posits that media consumers crave an infinitely expansive choice of media content; however, it is much more likely that consumers truly desire expedient fulfillment of their information needs. Victory goes to the media outlet that most expeditiously provides the material the consumer seeks.

Though most everyone acknowledges the need for student media to embrace convergence and emerging delivery systems, students often become reticent when actually faced with change. Some of that reluctance is easily attributed to the fact that this particular change has an uncertain endpoint. Further apprehension is caused by the need to break down established territorialism. Learning innovative technologies and embracing new communications processes provide further challenges for students’ acceptance of change. Ultimately, this evolution provides the potential to more effectively communicate with the student media audiences, and to thereby maintain relevance within the campus communities.

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