

What are the Information Needs of Communities & Citizens? Our information needs include job information regarding employment opportunities and developing skills to improve employability of community members. Additionally, information regarding housing programs like workshops on buying your first home and navigating the complicated financial information is necessary. Communities could greatly benefit from real estate reports that reflect their working class income and not just ads for over-priced condominiums. This situation has become critical in New York City as the city is rapidly losing its working class base and becoming a place exclusively for the rich.

Regarding media platforms and geographical focus, communities need all platforms whether video, audio, broadcast, print or web, to allocate resources for local programming. Too often commercial media companies favor entertainment that can be repeated through its affiliate holdings and neglect content that appeals to a more narrowly focused local audience.

How is Commercial Media Serving Your Community?

Commercial media hardly meets its licensing requirement to produce media to serve the public interest. One particularly egregious example is the use of automated media platforms which severely endangers lives by not providing real-time information to citizens in emergency situations. Young people also receive their media, even if it's educational information, with a commercial chaser. They are taught to be good consumers and perceive choice as simply the freedom to choose one brand of soda over another, one closed cell phone network over another. In addition because of cost-saving measures, commercial news outlets like television, radio, cable, satellite, print and even web rely on public relations for story ideas. This ill serves a community that depends on news to help guide their decisions on medication, automobile safety issues and others. If the news story originated from a press release trumpeting this incredible wonder drug or a safety test paid for by the automobile

industry then this information is compromised and should be disclosed to the public. However this is rarely done.

Commercial media is also not doing a good job providing for underserved communities. It is important to allow immigrants, low-wage workers, the homeless and the formerly incarcerated to speak through media. The debate on health care reform could have been broadened if patient rights advocates and holistic and alternative medicine practitioners entered the discussion. Mapping tools could have been used to better understand how banks and other financial institutions redline certain neighborhoods or how telecommunication companies roll out services to affluent neighborhoods before wiring low-income communities. These methods should be transparent rather than the protected property of private businesses.

Broadcast, cable and satellite providers should be held to a higher standard of providing public interest content. The FCC has done a poor job in watching these responsibilities. License renewals should not be a rubber stamp. If broadcasters do not meet these public interest obligations

they should be stripped of their licenses. This was done in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s to southern affiliates and if necessary should be done again.

What is the State of Noncommercial, Nonprofit, and Public Media?

Similar to commercial broadcasters, non-commercial broadcasters fail to adequately address local issues. In addition because of news staff cuts this type of coverage suffers. What is most troubling is that many local media outlets produce reports that are basically public relations material disguised as news stories. These can be tourist spots that highlight local restaurants or shops, leaving debate, analysis and discussion on topics like employment, housing and health out of this coverage. In terms of funding, the trend for non-commercial media has been to enter into sponsorship arrangements with large agribusinesses, oil companies, health insurance companies and telecommunications corporations. These large concerns use their underwriting support for non-commercial media to maintain a positive public image, crisis management and other self-serving considerations and not necessarily for the beneficent support of an important public information resource. These non-commercial broadcasters will not bite the hand that feeds them and do critical and investigative stories on these businesses. A recent example would be the terrible April 21, 2010 oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico that as of this writing has not been capped. The company British Petroleum (BP) has a record of incompetence and corruption that could hardly receive adequate investigation given the compromising situation these dependent broadcasters are in. One of the few outlets that traced this back story o!

f historical malfeasance was Democracy Now! a daily news program featured on listener-supported Pacifica Radio and public access television.

All this goes to show how important it is to amend the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967 and even go beyond so that all companies that utilize both the public and commercial channels, since the airwaves do belong to the people and licenses are allocated to corporations with an obligation to serve the public interest, pay to support operational and programming costs of public media.

There are wonderful examples of true community media like Low Power FM Radio and public access television. LPFM licenses should be made available in both rural and urban locations and therefore technical requirements should be adjusted to make this happen. The myth that these low watt frequencies would create havoc for airline communications should be exposed as a distortion of the truth. Like LPFM, public access television is likewise a precious preserve of public media that should be both protected and encouraged to grow. However public access TV resources have been undermined by bad franchise agreements or even eliminated in some communities. Furthermore cable and telecommunication companies don't see web-based content as part of PEG (public, educational and government) access' mission so they fail to support it. For example, if videoblogging classes are taught at public access TV centers these companies see this type of training as deviant from standard TV production cou!

res. In this era of media convergence this is not the case. And finally since cable companies are often also internet service providers for the community they should be obligated to allocate internet revenue as part of the franchise agreements with the municipalities they serve, but unfortunately they don't.

What is the Impact of the Internet and Mobile Information?

First off it is important that the Internet remain free and open with the principals of universal broadband and network neutrality guiding its processes. This will maintain an accessible platform for creative innovation and effective information dissemination. This already exists but is under threat as Internet Service Providers seek to change this structure in favor of a tiered system like cable and satellite television.

With regard to how specific members of our community like immigrants and other minorities utilize the Internet, since the Internet is global they may perhaps use broadband as a way to connect with their countries of origin. Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP) is an effective and currently low-cost means to reach out to their families abroad. And if network neutrality is not preserved this resource would be lost as telecommunications companies that also operate as ISPs would limit this competitive service. Regarding digital and media literacy programs as a means to help people navigate the new information technologies, as an educator and grassroots media advocate I would say this is very important, however these literacy skills are rarely taught in schools and other educational institutions. We should look to countries like Australia where media literacy curriculum is as common as learning math, science and history. People should learn the language of film, the persuasive techniques of advertising, the role public relations plays in generating news stories and the limitations of using closed networks like those of cell phone carriers.

And continuing with mobile technologies, this form of communications is already playing a larger role in the news and information needs of our communities and this trend will continue to grow over time. This new direction, which can also encourage opportunities for citizen journalists, should certainly be reflected in the FCC's regulation of mobile communications. These closed networks should be emancipated so programmers can develop mobile applications to support growth and innovation in this new platform. Harsh penalties for switching providers should be eliminated and choice should be paramount in selecting what kind of provider best meets your mobile communication needs. If you want to select a specific carrier for the expensive smart phone you just purchased you should be allowed to, something not currently available for consumers who shelled out hundreds of dollars for an iPhone.

