

An Information Community Case Study: Seattle

A digital community still in transition

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Seattle, Washington, could be considered a city singularly suited to develop a healthy democracy in the digital age. The city government, citizens and business have created a productive environment for the next generation of information-sharing and community engagement. Years of economic growth and relative prosperity has fostered new, superior practices in news and information. Yet, losing a major print newspaper, as Seattle did when *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer* closed, adversely affects a community, as it is one less place that provides public service journalism, stories about people and general community updates. In parallel Seattle has been at the center of an explosion of alternative news outlets, especially online, which has created a critical mass of information portals for geographic and social communities.

As the Knight Report, *Informing Communities: Sustaining Democracy in a Digital Age*, highlights, it is important to understand that there are three important elements to be considered as we analyze media and democracy in the 21st century:

- availability of relevant and credible information to all Americans and their communities;
- capacity of individuals to engage with information; and,
- individual engagement with information and the public life of the community.

However, despite the relative vibrancy of the media scene, and even with all its demographic and other advantages it is unclear how much of this innovation is sustainable. The local web is littered with websites that are no-longer updated, and few of the startups boast anything like the journalistic firepower of the papers of the past. In short, though the media landscape Seattle has many green shoots, few conclusions can be drawn about its ultimate future.



Introduction

Seattle entered the international spotlight in 1999 when tens of thousands of activists descended upon the city to protest a meeting of the World Trade Organization (WTO). These "Seattle People" earned the city's residents a reputation for outspoken activism, but the event was also an important bellwether for the influence of technology on the city's changing media environment.¹ The Independent Media Center (IMC) formed during the WTO protests for the purpose of disseminating breaking news online to people locally, nationally, and internationally. The independent and alternative media organizations and activists who came together at the IMC delivered audio and video footage online and also published print coverage of the protests for local readers.² More than a decade later, technology continues to play a significant role in the ways in which news and information are delivered to Seattle's diverse communities.

Much of the influence of technology on Seattle's local information ecology can be attributed to the region's economic influences. The information technology industry employs 90,000 people in the Seattle region, and the Puget Sound area is home to 150 interactive media companies, comprising an influential stake in that \$30 billion industry and putting Seattle at the forefront of technological innovation.³ Amazon.com is based in Seattle, and in nearby Redmond, WA, Microsoft alone employs 35,510 people in Seattle and the rest of the Washington State.⁴ It is also not to be forgotten that Microsoft launched one of the country's first online magazines, *Slate*, in 1996.⁵

The reach of the Seattle region's innovative technology sector stretches beyond its obvious implications for media: Pacific Northwest Community Grants, a special project of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, provides funding to area libraries, schools, and other community institutions in Seattle.⁶ With numerous technology start-ups on its doorstep, along with a thriving arts scene, many educational institutions, and robust neighborhoods, Seattle is as well as positioned as any city, having many of the necessary components for effective civic engagement, and the following paragraphs will assess the degree to which the city is leveraging those advantages to meet the information needs of its community.

Considering the rise of digital media and a favorable environment culturally and demographically to online information, in January 2010, the group Journalism that Matters chose Seattle as the location for a conference titled "Re-Imagining News and Community in the Pacific Northwest." The event centered around questions of how the press and the public can help each other, new media possibilities for citizens, and how to "activate new forms of civic and public engagement." There, journalism thinkers, practitioners, academia, activists, and news innovators gathered on the University of Washington campus to discuss the future of media in a democracy.⁷

The Great Recession has touched the city. Unemployment today is high -- about that of the national average -- and the city is facing a \$50 million general fund deficit for 2011, and revenues for the current budget are projected to be \$10 million less than anticipated.⁸ Seattle adopted a \$3.85 billion budget for 2010.⁹

Demography of the Region

The Seattle population has been growing over the last decade. According to 2009 estimates, Seattle has 602,000 residents and a population density of 6,717 persons per square mile.¹⁰ Seattle is located on the Puget Sound, about 100 miles south of Canada, and covers about 135 square miles. U.S. Census

estimates in 2009 calculated the per capita income in Seattle at \$37,461 and December 2009 estimates from the Bureau of Labor Statistics counted the unemployment rate at 9.1%. The city has dozens of neighborhoods within 13 districts: Ballard, Central, Delridge, Downtown, East, Greater Duwamish, Lake Union, Magnolia/Queen Anne, North, Northeast, Northwest, Southeast, and Southwest. Seattle is the seat of King County government, which covers 2,134 square miles and is home to 1.9 million people; King County is nearly twice the size of the average U.S. county and the 14th most populous county in the U.S. and includes 39 incorporated towns and cities.¹¹ King County is surrounded by Snohomish County (to the north), Pierce County (to the south), Kitsap County (to the west), and Chelan and Kittitas Counties (to the east).

In 2003 the Brookings Institute examined US Census data for Seattle and published the report, "Seattle in Focus: A Profile from Census 2000." The report noted that, as Seattle's population growth increased through the 1990s, the city's diversity also increased, with 27 percent of the population identifying as black, Asian and Hispanic.¹² Immigration has also contributed to the city's diversity, and in April 2010, the US Census reported that the Southeast Seattle neighborhood of Columbia City comprises the nation's most diverse zip code, with residents speaking some 59 languages.¹³

Seattle is an opportune case study for examining the future prospects of American media for the quality of the sample. Nearly 92 percent of the Seattle population holds a high school diploma or higher and 53.8 percent possess a bachelor's degree or higher, compared with 84.5% and 27.4%, respectively, at the national level.¹⁴ Seattle's media market has been described as "a well-educated, affluent market with high levels of home ownership and a predominantly white-collar workforce."¹⁵

The city's 88 public schools enrolled 45,933 students in 2008, and Seattle is also home to over 300 private and parochial schools. Additionally, the public University of Washington is the city's largest employer, with 28,188 faculty and staff and annual revenue of \$3.7 billion.¹⁶ The city is home to 10 other universities, including a community college system with multiple campuses and four art schools. The University of Washington includes an Information School, which has done research on the benefits to the American public of providing Internet access at libraries, among other topics,¹⁷ as well as a department of communication. Seattle University also has a communication/journalism department.

Print Media

Until 2009, Seattle was a two-newspaper town with a business agreement between the two papers. The *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, owned by the Hearst Corporation, and *The Seattle Times* were rival newspapers that shared a joint-operating agreement under which *The Times* was responsible for all business operations occurring outside the newsroom for both companies, such as delivery, printing, marketing, and advertising. When the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* ceased print publication on March 17, 2009, journalists and media critics bemoaned the death of what had become a civic institution, and the city was left with *The Seattle Times*, which now had fewer operating expenses, but also had less revenue following Hearst's dissolution of the joint-operation agreement. Still, *Times* Vice President for Public Affairs Jill Mackie told *The New York Times* that the partnership had been a crucial move in sustaining *The Seattle Times* financially.¹⁸ *The Times* has had to renegotiate its debt and cut newsroom staff from 375 to 210 people over the last five years, but following the end of *The P-I's* print publication, *The Times* has been earning a profit and

increased its print circulation in 2009 by 30%.¹⁹ The Blethen family holds a majority share in *The Times* and the McClatchy company is also a partial owner.

Despite its financial tribulations, *The Seattle Times* has been recognized for its quality journalism. The *Times*, founded in 1896, reaches 7 out of 10 adults in King and Snohomish Counties, and its online counterparts (seattletimes.com and four marketplace sites) receive 5 million unique visitors each month.²⁰ *The Times* has won eight Pulitzer Prizes, including one in 2010 for its breaking news coverage of the murders of four Seattle police officers and the manhunt that followed.²¹ In 2007, *The Times'* editorial pages published a series of essays, titled "The Democracy Papers," that examined the role of media in a democracy, with an eye to this century's increasing media consolidation and the effects of online media on traditional media. Ryan Blethen continues to discuss these issues in his blog on *The Times'* website.²² Non-profit funding has also allowed *The Times* to expand its collaboration with other types of media outlets: Supported by American University's J-Lab: The Institute for Interactive Journalism and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, *The Times* is pairing up with four local news producers to promote and share local news published by all of the outlets involved. The four local producers are Amber Campbell of *The Rainier Valley Post*, Tracy Record of the *West Seattle Blog* and *White Center*, Kate Bergman of Next Door Media which runs a number of local blogs), and Justin Carder, who runs *Capitol Hill Seattle* and who also helped create *Neighborlogs*, discussed below.²³

Seattle is also served by a number of other alternative and niche print publications. *The Stranger* is Seattle's alt-newsweekly. Three weekly neighborhood publications are owned by Robinson Newspapers: *The Ballard News-Tribune*, *West Seattle Herald*, and *Highline Times*. *The Belltown Messenger* is a neighborhood alt-monthly serving the Belltown neighborhood. Six weekly neighborhood publications are owned by the Pacific Publishing Company: *Queen Anne* and *Magnolia News*, *Madison Park Times*, *Capitol Hill Times*, *South Seattle Beacon*, *North Seattle Herald* and *Outlook*, and *The Monroe Monitor* and *Valley News*. Religious, ethnic, and niche print publications include the homeless-distributed *Real Change News*, the Asian American-focused *International Examiner*, *The Catholic Northwest Progress*, *El Siete Dias* (serving the Spanish-speaking population), *Fishermen's News*, *Nguoi Viet Tay Bac* (serving the Vietnamese community), *The North American Post* (serving the Japanese community), *Northwest Asian Weekly* (serving the Asian community), *Puget Sound Business Journal*, *The Seattle Chinese Post* (serving the Chinese community), *Seattle Daily Journal of Commerce*, *Seattle Gay News*, *The Seattle Medium* (African-American), *The Skanner* (African-American), and *Soy Source* (Japanese), among others.

Internet Media

The front page of the last print edition of the *Seattle P-I* featured a photo of the building's iconic globe with the caption, "You've meant the world to us." But did the *P-I* really encompass the city's media world? In recent years, community and hyperlocal blogs and online start-ups have sprung up in the Seattle area. With the relegation of the *Seattle P-I* to online-only publication and the precarious status of the last print newspaper standing, *The Seattle Times*, there exist numerous opportunities for alternative media to fill gaps in local coverage. *The Seattle P-I* has been an online-only publication since March 18, 2009, and in the course of its transition, the company cut its news staff from 165 people to 20.²⁴ The current website, SeattlePI.com, has continued to expand by adding blogs from readers. The site also features 9 neighborhood blogs and

is looking to add 14 more, covering neighborhoods in and around the city. SeattlePI.com collaborates with a number of additional local and national media outlets to share news and content: *KOMO-TV* (ABC affiliate), *Q13-FOX TV*, local suburban weekly newspaper chain Sound Publishing, *TVGuide.com*, *Film.com*, *Seattle Magazine*, as well as content from Hearst Corporation-owned newspapers and magazines.

In the Seattle region, 43% of adults regularly read news online and 21% read or contribute to blogs.²⁵ A compilation of Seattle websites focused on local neighborhoods or communities commissioned by the City of Seattle Information Technology department identified 260 non-traditional, linked news and information outlets -- from hyperlocal blogs to civic organization Facebook pages -- that span the city's 13 districts. Some of these online news sources have made use of government data in ways that are outside the scope of television news programs or city-wide newspapers. For example, *Capitol Hill Seattle* took advantage of a data set on designated heritage trees ("the oldest, largest, or most unique tree of that species in the city or neighborhood in which it resides") made public by the City of Seattle and created a map of historically significant trees in the Capitol Hill neighborhood.²⁶ A growing number of blogs are devoting resources to covering local and state political news, notably *PubliCola*, which provides a balance of civic news and cultural columns, but recently announced plans to refocus on political news.²⁷

Many of the sites rely on the volunteer efforts of its contributors, who often have journalism backgrounds. Some are even earning a profit or at least sustaining themselves. The *Neighborlogs* (neighborlogs.com) community news network, which sees 125,000 unique visitors per month, pays three full-time employees.²⁸ *Capitol Hill Seattle* invites readers to contribute to the blog and become part of a profit-sharing scheme through which writers earn a portion of the advertising revenue relative to the number of views their posts generate. The site also claims to set aside 10% of advertising space for local businesses.²⁹ Some sites were founded or are staffed by former journalists from Seattle's television stations and newspapers, such as *SeattlePost-Globe.org*, started by former *Seattle P-I* staffers, and Next Door Media, a hyperlocal news network covering nine neighborhoods. (Next Door Media founder Kate Bergman formerly worked for *KING 5* and *Northwest Cable News*, and co-founder Cory Bergman formerly led *KING5.com* and *NWGN.com*.) Next Door Media this year partnered with the University of Washington journalism school for a hyperlocal news site covering the University District.

A study we conducted of *The Seattle Times*, SeattlePI.com, and four neighborhood blogs revealed coverage of different news subjects across outlets. For three nonconsecutive days over a three-week period, we looked at the headlines on the home pages of SeattleTimes.com and SeattlePI.com, as well as those of the blogs *Capitol Hill Seattle*, *My Ballard*, *Wallyhood*, and *West Seattle Blog*.³⁰ An analysis of all the headlines included on each homepage showed that the blogs provided more local coverage specific to the neighborhoods they served than did the city-wide *Seattle Times* and *SeattlePI.com*. Specifically, *Capitol Hill Seattle* devoted 97 percent of its blog posts to neighborhood-specific issues in the Capitol Hill area of Seattle, while *West Seattle Blog*, *Wallyhood*, *My Ballard* devoted 96, 93, and 81 percent, respectively to the neighborhoods covered by those news outlets. *The Seattle Times* devoted an average of 11 percent of the articles on its homepage to issues concerning specific neighborhoods in Seattle, while 12 percent of stories on SeattlePI.com covered such topics.

We also coded for stories that covered subjects identified by the Knight Commission Report as serving local information needs, which covered political,

health, education, employment, social service, and arts and entertainment news. Each of the news outlets studied devoted the following percentage of stories listed on homepage to these subjects: *West Seattle Blog*: 84 percent; *Capital Hill Seattle*: 68 percent; *Wallyhood*: 63 percent; *My Ballard*: 50 percent; *SeattlePI.com*: 42 percent; and *The Seattle Times*: 38 percent. The study did not distinguish between original and republished content within each category, but overall, the results found that nearly 100 percent of content on *My Ballard*, 96 percent of content on *West Seattle Blog*, 89 percent of content on *Capital Hill Seattle*, and 60 percent of content on *Wallyhood* was original on the days studied. While not comprehensive, this preliminary study suggests that these online news start-ups, with less content and narrower focus than the two established city-wide outlets, serve different information needs than their counterparts in the mainstream media.

Additionally, as mainstream media's resources to provide investigative journalism have dwindled, a number of online start-ups have appeared to fill in the gaps. California-based Spot.U.S., an investigative journalism organization that pursues stories commissioned by members of the public, recently launched a Seattle unit.³¹ *InvestigateWest*, founded in July 2009, and *Crosscut*, founded in April 2007, are both nonprofit journalism organizations that serve the Northwestern U.S.³² region. Both of these sites see themselves as providing a role the traditional media cannot or do not fulfill. *InvestigateWest* runs in-depth investigative reports on stories such as sexual assault on college campuses,³³ and *Crosscut* aims to provide analytical, bipartisan viewpoints on a variety of political and cultural issues.³⁴

Public Television

Seattle's public, government, and community television stations include the *Seattle Channel* (Cable Channel 21), run by the city government; *KCTS* (PBS--Channel 9); and public access channel *SCAN-TV* (Cable Channel 77).

The *Seattle Channel* is an award-winning government-sponsored and run station that airs public affairs, community service, and arts programming, among other topics, both online and on cable television.³⁵ Launched in 2002, the channel is funded in part by cable franchise fees and supplemented with a \$5 million infusion of funds from Comcast for arts programming, to be paid out over a 10-year period. The *Seattle Channel* began by offering civic-oriented programming, such as airing city council meetings, but has expanded to coverage of cultural affairs, as well. General Manager Gary Gibson was named one of Seattle's most influential figures by *Seattle Magazine*.³⁶ In its early years, critics complained about the amount of air time the mayor occupied on the channel, but more recently, the Seattle Channel has received accolades for its original, engaging arts programming.³⁷ Indeed, the network's programming is surprisingly diverse: Ongoing series include *Art Zone with Nancy Guppy*, *Ask the Mayor*, *Community Stories*, *Front Row* (on performance art), *History in Motion* (showcasing historical films from Seattle's Municipal Archive), *Neighborhood News* (covering the city's 97 neighborhoods), *Seattle's Public Art*, and *Seattle's Sister Cities* (a look at cities around the world with which Seattle has developed relationships). As the Seattle Channel has expanded its arts features, it increased emphasis on providing live streaming and programs that include the nuts-and-bolts government accountability programming to the internet where it best accessed only by viewers with high-speed Internet access.

KCTS 9 operates 3 strands of programming in the Seattle area. The first station is the primary high-definition, general interest station and PBS affiliate. The second, *KCTS 9 V-ME*, serves Seattle's Spanish-speaking community. A third

station, *KCTS 9 Create*, features DIY, cooking, arts and crafts, and travel programs. One-third of the publicly funded network's viewers are in southwestern British Columbia, and they, too, contribute donations to PBS.³⁸ In total, *KCTS 9* has over 2.4 million viewers per week, 1.6 million of whom are in Washington State. In 2009 the station broadcast 160 episodes as part of regularly airing series on local public affairs, personal finance, business affairs, and economic issues. *KCTS* also aired 19 local specials on issues including Washington's national parks and the impact of the economic crisis. *KCTS 9* is regularly the top-viewed PBS station for individual programs such as *FRONTLINE*, *NOVA*, and *Independent Lens*.³⁹ In terms of local public affairs and community-oriented programming, however, *KCTS* offers less than either the Seattle Channel or *SCAN*.

The goal of Seattle's public access network, *SCAN*, is "to be a leading sector of the Seattle and King County digital 'commons', where every voice has value," according to the organization.⁴⁰ In the course of doing so, the 501(c)3 nonprofit provides equipment and production facilities for citizens of Seattle and other King County communities. Despite limited funds, *SCAN* often broadcasts more locally-produced public affairs programming per week than all broadcast television channels combined. The station also provides media literacy and production training, including classes on video editing. *SCAN*'s Youth Media program provides instruction in digital media production to Seattle youth in conjunction with organizations such as *Youth Media Institute*, the *Boys and Girls Club*, *Reel Grrls*, and *Youth Speaks Seattle*. The content produced in these workshops airs during dedicated Youth Media programming spots five days a week.⁴¹

Commercial Television

Seattle's primary commercial television stations are *KOMO* (ABC affiliate--Channel 4), *KIRO* (CBS affiliate--Channel 7), *KING 5* (NBC affiliate--Channel 5), *KCPQ* (Fox affiliate--Channel 13), and *KSTW* (CW--Channel 11). *King 5*, the local NBC affiliate, is owned by the Belo Corporation. The station has been recognized for its reporting with 56 Regional Emmy nominations in 2010, in 38 categories. These 56 nominations included recognitions for station excellence; news (spot, investigative, general assignment, weather, environmental, military, and sports); local programming (human interest, feature segments, arts and entertainment, historical/cultural, public affairs and hosts); promotions; and public service.⁴² *King 5* highlights the contributions of average citizens to the community in the feature "Home Team Heroes"⁴³ and also allows viewers to submit their own photo and video content via *KING5.com*.⁴⁴

KOMO is owned by Fisher Communications, which also owns *KOMO 2 --This TV*, *KUNS TV--Univision*, *KOMO 1000 Newsradio*, KVI Talk Radio 570 AM, and KPLZ Star 101.5 FM. Fisher Communications partnered with DataSphere Technologies last year to launch a series of 53 hyperlocal websites as a part of a larger "broadcast to broadband initiative" within the company. DataSphere provides the technology, advertising, and sales expertise to engage local advertisers, and *KOMO* provides the news content.⁴⁵ The hyperlocal sites include message boards, real estate listings, blog posts, links to other neighborhood websites (government and private), and advertisements from sponsors for each of the featured neighborhoods in and around Seattle. Stories posted to the blog have a "community" bent to them, focusing on subjects such as community service, news of interest to families, crime news, and events taking place around the neighborhood.

KIRO (CBS--7), which is owned by Cox Communications, notably maintains three reporters in a Washington, DC, bureau to cover news that affects viewers in

Western Washington State, one of whom has also spent some time as a reporter in Washington State. The station uses its website as a place to showcase video footage from behind the scenes of the stories it broadcasts, detailing some of the factors behind the production of the news. KIRO's website also features footage from its local High School Spirit competition, which encourages viewers to vote for the local high school with the most school spirit.⁴⁶

KSTW, owned by CW, which in turn is owned by CBS, features news about community issues on "CWII Connects." Recent stories have been accompanied by links on the channel's website to external housing, credit, mental health, and drunk driving prevention resources, and the network is also raising awareness of environmental issues through its "Project Green" spots.⁴⁷ *KCPQ* (Q13 Fox), owned by the Tribune Company, broadcasts five and a half hours of local news programming each weekday; the station is also affiliated with *MyQ2*, the My Network affiliate.⁴⁸

Radio

The radio dial in Seattle is solidly packed, with a mixture of locally- and non-locally-owned commercial stations, and noncommercial stations of various flavors.⁴⁹

KEXP-FM is a community public radio station operated by University of Washington. Its focus is mostly music though it has some public affairs programming on the weekends. *KUOW* is the primary NPR station for the Puget Sound area, based at the University of Washington. Seattle also picks up the signal for *KPLU*, the Tacoma NPR station based at Pacific Lutheran University. *KBGS* is a community radio station operated at Bellevue College, outside Seattle (music, cultural, and public affairs programming). Some Internet-only radio stations such as *Hollow Earth Radio*, a Pacific Northwest station based in Seattle, foster the local music scene and play less mainstream music.⁵⁰

Chris Bennett Broadcasting runs a trio of stations serving the local black community (*KRIZ*, *KYIZ* and *KJLZ*). In addition, two local high schools. The Nathan Hale station, *KNHC-FM (89.5, Seattle)*, has a highly regarded national reputation.

Local Government

The Seattle government has a strong web presence and policies relating to transparency. Seattle has strong open records laws. On April 27, 2009, the Seattle City Council passed Ordinance No. 122969 regarding the implementation of the Public Records Act for the State of Washington.⁵¹ The city website also publishes city council minutes, bills, ordinances, resolutions, and comptroller files.

The city has made civic engagement in the digital era a priority. Some of this intent was reflected in the initial creation in the mid 90's of their Public Access Network (*PAN*) and then in a 2002 Seattle Commission on Electronic Communications report.⁵² The city website, *Seattle.gov*, is a portal for community information that reflects community needs and interests and provides tools for civic understanding. The city's Department of Information Technology, dubbed DoIT, promotes broadband adoption, and last year initiated a new effort for City of Seattle Government 2.0. The initiatives include a public engagement portal, social media strategies, such as maintaining a YouTube and Twitter presence, city department blogs, a public forum to discuss and rank issues, an interactive map "mashup" of public safety service locations, and open data feeds.⁵³

Alongside the distribution of online information and services, the City has a long history of working to ensure residents have the technology access and literacy required to participate. This includes creating a position for a Community Technology planner and their Technology Matching Fund program, established in 1997.⁵⁴ The City has tracked residential technology adoption and e-gov participation since 2000. As a result of cable franchise negotiations, Comcast has provided \$500,000 for youth civic participation. The city IT department recently collaborated with the University of Washington Center for Communication and Civic Engagement, the YMCA and One Economy's Digital Connectors to launch PugetSoundOff.org, an online forum for the city's youth. The site last year won a first place Technology Solutions Award for Web and E-Government Services from the Public Technology Institute.⁵⁵ The department in April 2010 launched Seattle Communities Online, a program to promote digital literacy through discussion and training on online tools. For example, the department has collected an inventory of neighborhoods online presence, posted information on using a Wordpress blogging system, using Twitter for business promotion, and how to consider choice of colors on a website to serve communities across Seattle.⁵⁶

Seattle's Chief Technology Officer Bill Schrier is the president of the government information technologists group Metropolitan Information Exchange. He was elected to the one-year post in September 2009.⁵⁷

The city has dozens of neighborhoods within 13 districts: Ballard, Central, Delridge, Downtown, East, Greater Duwamish, Lake Union, Magnolia/Queen Anne, North, Northeast, Northwest, Southeast, and Southwest. Many community institutions in Seattle foster a neighborhood-centric perspective. There are, for example, 27 neighborhood branches of the Seattle Public Library and five historical societies devoted to local neighborhoods and regions.

The city holds town hall meetings to discuss citywide initiatives, as well as smaller town halls within voting districts. Although the neighborhood blogs are not generally aligned with voting districts (the blogs cover smaller areas), these sites are the most likely news medium to provide notice of upcoming town halls and to cover those events when they occur. For example, the week of April 19, 2010, "My Ballard" (*MyBallard.com*) had nine posts on opportunities for neighborhood or city-wide civic engagement, including notices of town hall meetings and announcements that Seattle Parks and Recreation was looking for citizen help to name several new parks.

Countywide Community Forums is a nonprofit group whose mission is to "make democracy more user-friendly" by scheduling neighborhood meet-ups around King County. Volunteers sign up to lead hyperlocal discussions of issues in homes, coffee shops, or other convenient places for a gathering of interested citizens.⁵⁸ In April 2010, the Community Forums group, through the Social Capital Review blog, launched *Public Data Ferret*, a retrieval system for public documents stored online at all levels of government. Forums Director and Review Founder Matt Rosenberg has scheduled appearances on a *KOMO 1000* morning radio show to talk about accessing open records.

As advised by Dr. Lewis Friedland of the University of Wisconsin School of Journalism and Mass Communications have chosen Seattle as a possible test site for a *common civic space* program for news, known as The Seattle Civic Communication Commons, that will share resources in which participating benefits the all people within the city or region more than a individual or group.

The Seattle Commons would grow from the existing resources in neighborhoods, communities, the non-profit sector, government, and business.

The Seattle Commons will be built and maintained by many hands with widespread ownership and responsibility in the civic space. A major assumption of the commons is that citizens increasingly live their lives in both physical and virtual spaces.⁵⁹

In May 2010, the Seattle Center Foundation agreed to make the Commons a part of their collective vision for Seattle on the 50th Anniversary of the Seattle World's Fair.

Arts and Entertainment, Social Service, and Health Information

The online portal of the Seattle city government includes a number of pages with resources on health and social service information. These include directories of hospitals, clinics, and services for children, families, the disabled, and the elderly. However, in addition to linking to existing organizations and institutions, the website itself also serves as an information resource on health-related and domestic issues.

Media outlets are more likely to provide links to outside resources of information or coverage of events held to raise awareness or funds for a social or health-related cause than to provide direct coverage of health and social service news. For example, broadcaster *KSTW* (CW-11) includes links to a smattering of social service organizations on its website, in conjunction with stories it has shown on air. Health coverage in blogs is often pegged to a fundraising event for a particular cause, while that on TV news programs frequently focuses on nutritional and diet-related topics.

There is little coverage of general social service-related information that is not pegged to the news cycle. In a rare exception to this, the *West Seattle Blog* proclaimed April 2010 "Disaster Preparedness Month" and published near-daily posts with safety tips for residents in case of various emergencies.⁶⁰

According to the Americans for Arts Association, Seattle is the top-ranked American city for arts-related businesses per capita.⁶¹ Stock photography company Getty Images, for example, which often provides images to other media outlets, is based in Seattle. All the news media include arts and entertainment listings; blogs and online news start-ups are most likely to cover small-scale events with a neighborhood focus. A local organization, *Reel Grrls*, offers programs to young women from underserved neighborhoods in Seattle that combine filmmaking instruction with mentoring. Reel Grrls often partners with the King County Department of Juvenile Justice and youth-oriented service organizations such as the Atlantic Street Center to hold video camps.

Libraries

Last year, The Seattle Public Library system served 14 million customers, a 7 percent rise over 2008, according to the library website. The city libraries offer media literacy coursework and multiple services to patrons, both online and in-person, including free online homework help; ask-your-librarian by email, chat, text, or phone; a blog for teens; and computer classes. All libraries provide free wi-fi as well as a number of public computers. The Seattle Public School system also encourages media literacy training with "The Source,"⁶² a learning support system used by students, school faculty, and parents and the use of technologies such as Google Earth and multimedia applications.

As mentioned above, the City of Seattle's Community Technology Program offers some media training, mostly online media, to the public, as well as grants

to community organizations to foster digital literacy, use of technology for community building and production of media content.⁶³ A number of local organizations offer media training, including the Youth Media Institute, Reclaim the Media, Reel Grrls, Jack Straw Productions, and the Technology Access Foundation which focuses on computer hardware and programming skills for youth of color. Additionally the city maintains a directory of community technology centers.

The city budget shortfalls for 2010 and 2011 have required mid-year cost cutting in the library system. The library will have to cut 3 percent of its budget, or \$1.5 million. To do this, the library system will reduce operating hours and close for one week this year.⁶⁴ Also, the library's 2010 budget is \$1.77 million lower than the 2009 budget.

Broadband Connectivity

In 2009, *Forbes* magazine ranked Seattle the most wired city in the U.S., and tenth in broadband connectivity.⁶⁵ Adults in the Seattle area use e-mail more than those in any other American media market, and the Seattle market also ranks third for Internet use among adults (by percentage of population).⁶⁶

Nonetheless, distinct digital divide inequalities persist in Seattle. Low income families and people of color in Seattle are about 30% less likely to access high-speed Internet at home than their higher-income and white neighbors.⁶⁷ They are also less likely to use the Internet for a number of applications.⁶⁸

The range of competitive broadband options offered in the city is not extensive. Comcast is one broadband service provider in Seattle. Comcast lists monthly prices of \$42.95 for service with download speeds of 15 Mbps and upload speeds of 3 Mbps and speeds up to 50 Mbps download and 10Mbps upload for \$99.⁶⁹ Broadstripe is a smaller local provider, and the company is in bankruptcy. However the company's general manager announced in a March 2010 "Let's Get Connected" discussion panel that customers with a cable modem should be getting up to 10 Mbps download speeds.⁷⁰ Qwest provides DSL up to 7 mbps download speed in some areas, but as little as 1.5 mbps in others.⁷¹ Clearwire is a relatively new entrant to the market and offers wireless broadband that reaches some neighborhoods not served by wireline connections. A check on the company website indicates 4G network mobile broadband speeds of up to 6 Mbps download and 1 Mbps upload are available in the University District for \$40 per month.⁷²

Wi-fi is widely available across Seattle, but most available signals are run privately by cafes or other businesses. The City of Seattle has installed free public wi-fi in two commercial areas, parts of Columbia City and parts of the University District, four downtown parks and the City Hall lobby and conference rooms. King County's Metro Transit has experimented with offering wi-fi on buses. Seattle also has applied for Google's Fiber for Communities scheme.⁷³

A 2006 City Council task force recommended that Seattle invest in a municipal fiber broadband network system, and a growing community network called the Seattle Digital Justice Coalition is pressing the city to take action on that recommendation. Mayor Mike McGinn supports this initiative, and the City Council included addressing the city's broadband needs on its list of priorities for 2010. It is unclear, however, if or when the City will implement this project especially given the financial climate. The City does own the poles as a result of a municipal electrical utility, City Light, and thus is well positioned to move ahead.^{74, 75}

Conclusion: Do citizens and communities have all the information they want and need?

In many ways, Seattle is a model society for a healthy democracy in the digital age. The city government, citizens and business have created a productive environment for the next generation of information-sharing and community engagement. Years of managed growth and prosperity has fostered new, superior practices in news and information.

The people of Seattle value an accessible government, accessible education and prosperous communities and they use new tools to achieve those ideals. Seattle has strong open records laws. The city aspires to broadband access that is high speed, affordable and widespread. Community outreach efforts and new media training are high priority among officials, who pose solutions to problems before they arise.

The city government's website provides a dynamic repository of information residents need to make decisions for their well-being. City newsfeeds alert residents to the latest program or issues. Public access broadcasting is strong, offering original programming across multimedia, although the greatest diversity in programming is found among the least-well funded community media outlets.

These public elements in the information infrastructure are especially important during a protracted economic downturn affecting news businesses. The city of 600,000 people, in a county with a population nearing 2 million, now has only one major, daily print newspaper, as the secondary daily newspaper migrated to online-only due to a weakened print news industry in flux. Understanding the reality of remaining relevant in today's Internet society, the remaining newspaper is committed to adapting to the new news environment through collaborations with other local news providers. Commercial broadcast companies are experimenting with their own hyperlocal sites.

Further, traditional media outlets, with the exception of the loss of the second daily newspaper, continue to deliver information to general and niche audiences. However, the concentration of ownership, with four firms owning 51% of the area's local news market, provide evidence of highly concentrated media ownership.⁷⁶

Academia also has contributed to the new news foundation as the University of Washington prepares future journalism students in a progressive local news environment. The university's journalism school is partnering with a hyperlocal start-up site to cover the campus neighborhood.

Public and private entities are working flexibly to keep the people of Seattle connected to what they need. The sensibilities are established for continued demand for better information services. A protracted economic downturn will likely slow implementation of digital community engagement initiatives, but the vision is there, in many cases. However, this optimism for media space that is inclusive and efficacious in the digital age has to be considered in the light of broadband prices that are beyond a segment of the population and the fact that already a number of websites spawned in the digital enthusiasm present across the region are already derelict and no longer updated. In short, there is much to be lauded in Seattle but little is guaranteed in a media market that has only recently lost significant journalistic resources few of which have been replaced by the burgeoning blogosphere.

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Seattle FM Radio Stations: KBSG 97.3 FM - "Good Times. Great Oldies". Oldies music.

KCMS 105.3 FM (SA) - "Seattle's Family Friendly Radio Station". Christian music., KEXP (formerly KCMU) 90.3 FM (SA) - "Where The Music Matters". UW student run radio. Live and archived streaming music. An innovative, eclectic mix of alternative rock, hip hop, electronic, roots & blues, world & reggae, jazz, and more. KGRG 89.9 FM (SA) - Today's Rock. Local music, Punk, Progressive, Alternative Rock, Underground Hip-Hip. KING 98.1 FM (SA) - Classical music. Live streaming audio. KISS 106.1 FM - "#1 For All The Hits". Rock music. KISW 99.9 FM - Popular rock. Howard Stern. The KISW Rock Girls. KJR 95.7 FM (SA) - "SuperHits of the 60s & 70s". KLSY 92.5 FM - "The Best MIX Of The 80s, 90s & Now!" Contemporary popular music. KPMS 94.1 FM - Seattle's #1 country music station. Ichabod Caine. KMTT 103.7 FM - "The Mountain". Adult alternative music. KNDD 107.7 FM - "The End". Alternative rock. Loveline with Adam Carolla and Dr. Drew. KPLU 88.5 FM (SA) - "NPR News And All That Jazz". "World Class Jazz". Live streaming audio. KPLZ 101.5 FM - "STAR 101.5". Today's hits. Kent & Alan. KQBZ 100.7 FM - "The BUZZ". Talk radio. Robin & Maynard, BJ Shea, Phil Hendrie, Tom Leykis (Live Streaming), Kim Komando, Rhona At Night, Shaken Not Stirred. KRWM 106.9 FM - "Warm 106.9". Soft favorites. KSER 90.7 FM (SA) - Not heard in Seattle, as the station is in Everett, but their terrific Eclectic World Music can be heard on Streaming Audio. Worth a listen. KUBE 93.3 FM - "Seattle's #1 Hit Music Station". Hit music. T-Man. Nighttime Playaz. KUOW 94.9 FM (SA) - "Puget Sound Public Radio". NPR programming. Morning Edition. All Things Considered. A Prairie Home Companion. Live streaming audio. Streaming Archives. KWJZ 98.9 FM - "Smooth Jazz". KYPT 96.5 FM - "The Point". The 80s & more. KZOK 102.5 FM - "Seattle's Only Classic Rock Station". (From http://www.therainiervalley.com/radio_web_sites.html) Accessed May 6, 2010.

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