

Before the  
FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION  
Washington, D.C.

From Town Crier to Bloggers: )  
How Will Journalism Survive )  
the Internet Age? ) Project No. P091200  
)  
New Media Workshop Comment )

**COMMENTS OF BARRINGTON BROADCASTING GROUP, LLC,  
BELO CORP., DISPATCH BROADCAST GROUP,  
FREEDOM BROADCASTING, INC., GANNETT CO., INC.,  
GRAY TELEVISION, INC., LIN TV CORP.,  
POST-NEWSWEEK STATIONS, INC., AND RAYCOM MEDIA, INC.**

**Introduction**

The local television broadcast stations of Barrington Broadcasting Group, LLC, Belo Corp., Dispatch Broadcast Group, Freedom Broadcasting, Inc., Gannett Co., Inc., LIN TV Corp., Post-Newsweek Stations, Inc., and Raycom Media, Inc. serve the public in almost 150 communities across the United States. The communities we serve range from top-ten cities to smaller towns, stretching from Maine to Hawaii.

We have seen firsthand how the content and advertising competition created by Internet and other new-media platforms has significantly challenged all news organizations, as the Commission's notice points out,<sup>1</sup> and local television journalism is no exception. Particularly in light of the current economic downturn,

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<sup>1</sup>*Public Workshops and Roundtables: From Town Crier to Bloggers: How Will Journalism Survive the Internet Age?*, Notice Announcing Public Workshops and Opportunity for Comment (September 30, 2009) (the "Notice").

broadcasters across the country must do more with fewer resources. Even as we create new efficiencies, however, television broadcast journalism remains a central foundation of the local media ecosystem in all of our markets. Our role — particularly in times of crisis — has not been, and likely will not be, displaced by new-media content providers. In fact, our role is being expanded and reenergized as we deploy new digital and Internet technologies to effectively gather news, more efficiently distribute content on multiple screens, and more creatively serve our communities.

These brief comments are intended to provide background for the Commission on the essential role of local broadcast journalism in communities across the country. We also will provide an overview of how television broadcasters are embracing new-media technologies to better serve our local communities, and how we are creating efficiencies while preserving our role at the center of our communities' media ecosystems.

## **I. Local Broadcast Journalism Is an Essential Part of the Media Marketplace That Is Not Being Displaced by New Media.**

There is no doubt that new technologies have created significant new diversity in content and competition in advertising in the marketplace for news and information. New technology has not, however, changed the primacy of local broadcasting as the central source for local news, sports, and weather coverage in our communities. This is particularly true in times of crisis, when emergency journalism becomes essential to the lives of those we serve.

Local television journalism has earned this central place in the local media ecosystem by being the trusted voice of the community. Recent survey research confirms that local broadcast journalism remains the most trusted medium — to us, this result is not surprising but merely confirms our experience in reporting daily in our communities.<sup>2</sup>

For example, in 2008, the mayor of Detroit was embroiled in controversy surrounding his personal conduct, including questions of whether he violated the law.<sup>3</sup> The overwhelming topic of discussion in Detroit was whether the mayor should resign. The main anchor at Station WDIV-TV in Detroit, a twenty-five year veteran, put together a commentary that captured the feeling and pulse of the city, and this commentary had the effect of galvanizing public opinion. Eventually, the mayor resigned, and local broadcast journalism continues to play a critical role in that story. Although this is a high-profile example of broadcasters' trust and credibility among local audiences, it is not by any means an isolated one.

Local broadcast journalism has earned its communities' trust by covering not only the high-profile issues that might be the most heavily discussed online, but also the day-to-day issues that are of great importance to our communities. During the most recent election, for example, local stations conducted

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<sup>2</sup> The Pew Research Center for the People & The Press, PUBLIC EVALUATIONS OF THE NEWS MEDIA: 1985-2009, PRESS ACCURACY RATING HITS TWO DECADE LOW (September 12, 2009) (favorability ratings of local television news remains at the top of all media, with 73 percent of respondents considering it favorable).

<sup>3</sup> See *Kwame Kilpatrick: A Mayor in Crisis*, <http://beta.freep.com/kwamekilpatrick> (last accessed Nov. 5, 2009).

debates on local ballot initiatives, and provided meaningful coverage not only of statewide races such as governor, but also of city council and other local elections. The recent swine flu epidemic also illustrates the vital function played by local broadcast stations. National media outlets and the Internet can provide generally applicable information, but local broadcast stations provide county and community-specific information about where vaccinations and medical care are available. If city or town officials close an important local road or otherwise disrupt a community, viewers look to their local broadcast station for information about available detours and the duration of the inconvenience, as well as the facts about what contractors the city or town has hired and issues that are arising related to the project. These may not be the high-profile issues that generate blog traffic, but their value to the lives of our communities is enormous.

The role of local broadcasting is particularly essential in the case of emergency journalism. In case after case, local television journalists provide life-saving information about whether emergencies and other crises, from the collapse of the Mississippi River bridge in Minneapolis to season-after-season coverage of hurricanes, tornadoes and wildfires. Viewers trust television journalists to provide reliable and thorough coverage of life-threatening emergencies. This role is supplemented by new technologies, national services and other media, to be sure, but the central responsibility for emergency journalism in communities across the United States lies with local broadcasters. It is an essential role that we embrace as part of the core of our service to our communities.

## **II. Local Broadcast Journalists Are Embracing New Technologies to Better Serve Their Local Communities.**

Broadcast stations across the country are making news available to viewers when they demand it, and on any device they wish to use to receive it. The era of newsrooms gathering and reporting the news for evening news broadcasts is over. Instead, broadcast stations are now twenty-four hour-a-day and seven-day-a-week news operations that report news immediately on a wide variety of media. Stations now have interactive websites with sophisticated technology that allows for live-streaming, breaking news coverage that viewers can watch and on which they can also provide their own comments. These technologies enable stations to provide much fuller content.

For example, stations can use their online platforms to make available full-length interviews and fuller coverage of segments that were edited and shortened before appearing on the air. Because of time constraints, broadcasters might be able to include only a portion of a much longer story or interview on their linear over-the-air channels. But stations can make a longer story or a full interview available online. For example, one station implemented web streaming of five solid hours of election coverage on its website on election day, greatly supplementing the coverage available on its over-the-air broadcast. Stations can also operate and moderate live blogs during local elections and other important events. In some larger markets, stations have devoted reporters exclusively to web content.

Local broadcast journalism also is taking advantage of new mobile technologies. Many stations have mobile-enhanced WAP sites for news, making local journalism available to mobile phones. Stations have developed and are developing applications for iPhones, the Google Android platform, and Blackberries, making their content available to viewers any time and on any device. Viewers can track severe weather using mobile technologies by visiting mobile sites; they often can find additional content, such as high-school football games. Viewers also can elect to receive email and text updates for weather and other news alerts.

Interactive web platforms also allow broadcast stations to involve viewers directly in news coverage. User-generated content supplements station coverage and provides information that stations might not otherwise have the resources to gather and report. For example, stations used Twitter to solicit user content relating to the lines at polling places during this week's election. Stations would not otherwise have had the resources to provide up-to-date information about waiting times at dozens of polling places to those at home getting ready to vote. By soliciting user content on Twitter and then posting those comments on a website and using that information as an on-air resource, broadcast stations provided viewers with information that would not otherwise have been available to them. User-generated content applications also allow viewers to contribute to the resolution of community issues that are reported in broadcast stories. In the event of a missing child, for example, users can comment on web platforms to share their sympathy and also to give information that may be vital to locating the child.

Increasingly, broadcast news is a two-way street with users driving content in many respects. Broadcast stations find stories and news through many different means, but new technologies empower viewers to bring the stories to stations. One example of how viewers drive the content of story lines is the “Take Back the Neighborhood” series that stations in at least two Raycom markets have aired. The series reports on neglected neighborhoods and what local government is doing to address the neglect and related community problems. The problems that these stations focus on are largely identified through information received from the community. Moreover, these series highlight another role for broadcast journalism: helping people solve problems, such as community neglect. In one community in which a “Take Back the Neighborhood” series aired, city officials told an individual complaining about a problem property that she might be better off contacting her local broadcast station then going directly to the city for assistance. Similarly, broadcast coverage can put pressure on local law enforcement and other officials to provide information to the public that they might otherwise withhold. In some instances, government officials will schedule and hold their first press conference on an issue hours before a local station plans to run a special on the subject.

Digital technology also has changed the way stations gather news and produce live television. At a number of stations, reporters can publish content to Web sites and mobile sites from a laptop on the road, so long as they have access to the Internet, or access to a Skype or WiFi connection. They can now perform live remote broadcasts for newscasts without expensive and cumbersome satellite

equipment by using video-over-Internet products. Several years ago, it would not have been possible for many local stations to send reporters overseas or across the country for stories. Internet-based equipment makes it possible to deliver content and video back home at the cost of access to the Internet. While more sophisticated in many respects, cameras are also much easier to use and more accessible.

Reporters can often capture footage with cell phones and other small devices that record video.

New technologies have improved journalism by making more people — both within and outside the newsroom — part of the news process. Certainly, the variety of ways in which viewers can contribute content and drive the direction of news coverage enfranchises those viewers in the newsgathering and reporting process. Most stations and many individual reporters have Facebook pages and Twitter accounts that allow them to interact directly with their communities. The intimate connection between viewers and newscasters is, in many ways, a unique relationship.

In virtually all cases, of course, local broadcast organizations are unable to hire additional staff to deploy all of these new digital and Internet technologies — the meaning of the expression “to do more with less” has never been more applicable than it is today. Broadcasters are exploring innovative means to realize efficiencies in newsgathering while maintaining their longstanding commitment to their local markets.

For example, news organizations that own multiple stations in different markets once provided largely independent coverage of news events. These organizations are finding new ways to share content among different stations, so that, for example, multiple sports departments do not write stories about the same event. Coordinating coverage conserves resources that local stations can then use to provide coverage uniquely important to their communities. Some organizations have consolidated other functions to both economize and enhance their product. One news organization has centralized its high-end graphics in one location, while providing Internet-based software that can be used by reporters to generate standard graphics. Previously, each location had its own graphics department, and stations in smaller markets did not have access to high-end graphics and maps. By centralizing the graphics function, the station has improved its product in smaller markets and saved money that can be invested in other functions.

News organizations also are finding ways to share expenses with other broadcasters in the same community. In some markets, stations are exploring relationships with other stations to pool certain resources for commodity events such as press conferences and court hearings. In other markets, news stations may share the expense of a helicopter for footage that would be largely identical if shot from separate aircraft. Other more enduring arrangements may involve the sharing of back-office and other expenses. The common element in all of these arrangements is that they provide creative mechanisms for broadcasters to redeploy

journalistic resources in the most effective manner possible for service to their local communities.

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There is little doubt that we are subject to additional content and advertising competition from a variety of new-media sources, and that this competition has transformed our markets. This new competition, and the current downturn, have increased the overall challenges facing television broadcasters in local markets. Yet, our central role in our communities remains as important today as ever, and we appreciate the Commission's focus on these essential issues.

Respectfully submitted,

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