

## Local cable news program

By Ron Buel/10/2009

Local television news is an oxymoron in Portland, as it is in local markets across the nation. Exhaustive studies of local TV news, including by the Rocky Mountain Institute of Boulder, Colorado, mapping out minutes spent carefully, shows that on the average, local news programs in our market spend 58% of their time on sports, weather and advertising.

Of the remaining 42%, more than 51% of that time is spent covering “mayhem” — murders and crimes, fires and disasters, auto accidents and other coverage that demonstrates the motto, “If it bleeds, it leads.” Another 38% of that remaining time is spent on “fluff” — births at the zoo, dogs painted green on St. Patrick’s Day and happy talk among the newscasters.

This means that the typical hour-long Portland TV news program spends less than two and one-half minutes on real news of broad interest and importance. It is entirely safe to say that the public interest is not being served by Portland’s local network affiliate TV news.

Yet several factors make local TV news an opportunity for our new community enterprise.

- Portland’s expanding community of filmmakers has the skills needed to make video and documentaries.
- Many local journalists have been trained how to operate a camera, a microphone and an Avid editing suite. Crossing over to TV journalism is not a foreign concept for the young “mojo” – the modern journalist.
- There are good national models of what excellent TV journalism looks like: The Lehrer News Hour, Frontline, 60 Minutes and others. According to the Lehrer News Hour, Portland is among the nation’s leaders in providing audience per capita for this style of programming.
- Perhaps most importantly, the market for TV advertising exceeds \$100 million a year. This means that a solid effort to produce local news of depth and importance, and to sell advertising into that programming, should be able to capture enough market share to fund itself, and to be able to assist our over-arching non-profit organization.

The beauty of such an effort to produce local TV news is that it can easily be tied into an Internet news site. As YouTube regularly proves, video does particularly well in drawing eyeballs to the Internet. <http://www.niemanlab.org/2009/10/youtubes-local-news-vids-get-clicks-show-some-serious-traffic-potential/>

Moreover, the Internet can be used to archive and make available background video footage. Imagine a Portland City Hall hearing on a baseball park in Lents. The news

segment might run from five to ten minutes but the whole hearing can be filmed and then archived for viewing on the news site.

Perhaps the ultimate format for local TV news in Portland would be a cable channel devoted to in-depth and enterprise reporting based on beats listed below. A two-hour nightly news program beginning at 6 p.m. could lead the way. It might be followed by half-hour nightly programs on Portland's business and economy, and then one on Portland's arts and entertainment. Then the two-hour nightly news program would simply be re-run at 9 p.m. At 11 p.m., a community forum program would run for an hour. This six hours could be put on "a wheel" and be repeated three more times over the next 24 hours, with advertising sold into the whole wheel.

The nightly 11-p.m.-to-midnight forum programming can be used to invite the community to come together to work on solving community problems in an open, democratic meeting. In his book "Breaking the News", James Fallows offers examples of other communities who have done that very thing. During the political season, the forum could be used as an opportunity to question candidates on topics that are relevant to their respective offices, illuminating differences in a kind of thorough "voters' pamphlet of the air."

### **A list of beats to be covered for the Portland region**

#### Politics, public policy and programs

- 1) State government and the legislature
- 2) The Federal congressional delegation and Congress as it impacts on Oregon
- 3) Metro
  - a. Council, Zoo, Convention and Expo centers, regional planning and regional transportation, land use
- 4) Counties
  - a. Multnomah, Clackamas, Clark and Washington
- 5) Portland City Hall and City Council

#### Education

- 6) Higher Education
  - a. PSU, U of O, Oregon State.
- 7) Portland-area community colleges
  - a. Portland, Mt. Hood, Clackamas, Clark
- 8) Private Higher Education
  - a. Reed, Lewis & Clark, University of Portland, Linfield, Pacific
- 9) K-12, Portland Public Schools,
  - a. suburban school districts, OEA and the teachers

## Public issues

- 10) Health Care
  - a. area hospitals, OHSU, policy, workforce, quality of care, cost, access, Drs, nurses and the practice of medicine, pharmaceuticals, insurers, government policy, reform.
- 11) Justice system
  - a. Oregon Supreme Court, Court of Appeals, County Circuit Courts, judges, district attorneys, public defenders, the practice of law, corrections, crime & punishment, alcohol and drug treatment, fire and police.
- 12) Transportation
  - a. ODOT, Tri-Met, light rail and transit, autos, oil and highways, bicycles and pedestrians, airlines, high speed rail and commuter rail, land-use and greenhouse gas emissions, climate change, air and noise pollution.
- 13) Social issues
  - a. diversity, immigration, poverty, family support, homelessness, drug and alcohol addiction, civil rights, social trends and issues, public health, death and dying, AIDs, gay rights, abortion, feminism, what makes us happy, etc.
- 14) Charitable giving, non-profits, foundations, United Way, philanthropy, volunteers
- 15) Churches, religions, spirituality, tolerance – politics and community impact.
- 16)
  - a. natural gas, oil, electricity, water, coal, conservation, renewables, carbon, solar, wind, dams, nuclear, electric cars and hybrids, smart grid, recycling, Public Utility Commission, Utilities.

## Arts and Entertainment

- 17) Local
  - a. local music scene – classical, jazz, pop, country, local film-makers, local artists, local Theatre, local Dance, the ballet, the symphony and opera. Local writers and their books Local restaurants, food and brew. Reviews by locals of national film, books, concerts, television available.

## Business

- 18) Local economic issues.
  - a. Knowledge economy vs. service economy. Local stocks, markets and investments. Companies headquartered here. Major economic sectors – farm, forest, technology, footwear and apparel, microbrews, business service, etc. Trends and cycles. Population and demographics.