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PBS: WEB-BASED PROMOTION IN THE DIGITAL AGE - WSIU PUBLIC BROADCASTING: A CASE STUDY

by

Katrina E. Stackhouse

B.S., Southern Illinois University, 2005

A Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Master of Science Degree

Department of Mass Communication and Media Arts
in the Graduate School of
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
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RESEARCH PAPER APPROVAL

PBS: WEB-BASED PROMOTION IN THE DIGITAL AGE - WSIU PUBLIC BROADCASTING: A CASE STUDY

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A Research Paper Submitted in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Science

in the field of Professional Media and Media Management

Approved by:

Robert Spahr, Chair

Monica Tichenor

Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
April 8, 2010

AN ABSTRACT OF THE REASEARCH PAPER OF

KATRINA E. STACKHOUSE, for the Master of Science degree in Professional Media and Media Management, presented on April 8, 2010, at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

TITLE: PBS: WEB-BASED PROMOTION IN THE DIGITAL AGE - WSIU PUBLIC BROADCASTING: A CASE STUDY

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Robert Spahr

The project/paper is an analysis of public service broadcasting to see how broadcasters are using the Internet to promote their services and brand. The project features a literature review of the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) looking at both the service's history and evolution over time. The project also features a case study of WSIU Public Broadcasting and the organization's website, wsiu.org, to examine how the organization uses the web to promote their services, programming, and community outreach efforts. The project concludes with recommendations for how WSIU can re-configure or re-design their website or use social media to better connect with the public.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

With the onset of the digital age, many businesses have had to revise their existing promotional strategies to include the Internet and some social media. For many organizations, the creation of a website simply involves publishing a static HTML page, or series of pages, that provide basic information about the company. Oftentimes this information is “evergreen” and does not change.

Other types of businesses, such as a print and television media, require a more powerful website - one with dynamic capabilities. Database-driven websites are the best option for businesses that need to change the content of their website on a daily or hourly basis. Database-driven websites allow site’s content to be loaded with fresh information every time the page is viewed. There are many other advantages. One advantage is that these types of pages offers users the highest level of functionality and allows for easy updating.

Additionally, database-driven webpages create increased opportunities to create repeat viewers. Visitors are more likely to revisit the site if it has regularly changing news and information. Perhaps the most beneficial advantage of database-driven websites are their ability to provide a platform to reach out into virtual space and collaborate with the public via web 2.0 technologies. Database-driven webpages do, however, have disadvantages. Prior to the emergence of free software/open-source content management systems (CMS) like Wordpress,

Drupal, and Joomla, database-driven webpages were more expensive, took longer to develop, and cost more to host. Research has shown that consumers prefer these types of websites because they provide a more interactive online environment and, many times, provide much more relevant information (Moe, 2008).

The term web 2.0 is a creative descriptor for the next generation of Internet technology, but the term actually refers to a set of physical technologies and a burgeoning ideology. I used the term to refer to both a set of technologies and a philosophy that has increased interactivity on the Internet. In the article, *What Is Web 2.0: Design Patterns and Business Model for the Next Generation of Software*, author Tim O'Reilly discusses the transition from web 1.0 to 2.0. He notes that this transition has lead to an evolution and a re-defining of the Internet's original promise to man. According to O'Reilly, a few of the core competencies of web 2.0 are: the willingness to give users control as co-developers, the harnessing of collective intelligence, easy to use interfaces, and software above the level of a single user (O'Reilly, 2007).

Web 2.0 technologies allow users to do more than just retrieve information; it allows for two-way communication and information sharing. It promotes user-generated content like comments, video uploads and contributions to blogs, which all help foster a feeling of community within a site. But web 2.0 is more than a handful of comment boxes and user-generated video clips; it also is invariably tied to the open-source revolution.

According to The Open Source Initiative (OSI), a non-profit organization devoted to expansion of the open-source philosophy, “open source is a development method for software that harnesses the power of distributed peer review and transparency of process. The promise of open source is better quality, higher reliability, more flexibility, [and] lower cost, (OSI, n.d.).” This, do-it-yourself-and-share-it movement has given birth to a variety of free software like Mozilla’s popular Firefox Internet browser and OpenOffice.org’s Open Office word processing suite.

Richard Stallman and other free software/open-source activists have been trying to provide quality, alternative software for consumer use since the early 1980s. Stallman, a software developer, was the creator of the GNU operating system, which according to stallman.org is a “unix-like operating system meant to be entirely free software.” Stallman also created the GNU/Linux system, which is a variant of GNU. In addition to the GNU/Linux operating system, Stallman is also responsible for the creation of the GIMP (short for the GNU Image Manipulation Program), a formidable competitor to Adobe’s graphics editing software empire. In 1985 he started the Free Software Foundation. According to Brian Sullivan of the Free Software Foundation, the organization aims to uphold its “worldwide mission to promote computer user freedom and to defend the rights of all free software users.”

The open-source philosophy and free software movement has also lead to the development of content management systems (CMS) like Drupal, Wordpress, and Joomla. These CMS platforms allow any business or person to

create, publish, and manage a wide variety of content on a website for a fraction of the traditional costs.

These types of free CMS can give broadcasters and other businesses the power to create and manage their own dynamic website without the help of a hired graphic designer or web developer. Alternatively, these types of CMS can help web developers redistribute their workload. Most open-source CMS provide administrative (and protective) features to allow other staff members to update the site even if they have limited web-programming knowledge. Even more so, most of these CMS services enable businesses to extract powerful data about their audience and create intimate online communities where they can reinforce their brand image and values.

The emergence of these free open-source CMS is especially relevant to non-profit organizations that have limited promotional budgets. Using Drupal, Wordpress, or Joomla, these organizations can easily create an online environment where they can gather demographic information about their publics, create membership and fundraising opportunities, and gain public awareness.

In the following research paper I will examine how non-profit public broadcasters can use web 2.0 technologies like social media and open-source CMS platforms like WordPress to promote their products and services and create stronger online communities with their publics. In order to accomplish this goal I will use WSIU Public Broadcasting's website, wsiu.org, as a case study to

determine how the organization can best utilize web 2.0 technologies to re-design their website or supplement its existing pages.

In order to address the full scope of the project, I will divide my analysis into four sections. The first section is devoted to a literature review of public broadcasting and its journey into the 21st century. The second portion of the paper will feature a situation analysis of WSIU Public Broadcasting to determine how the station develops content for the web. This section will also feature a discussion of the changes the staff would like to make regarding the website. The third section of this paper will feature observational research study and a discussion which aims to determine how individuals interact with the existing website. The fourth section will feature a critique of WSIU Public Broadcasting's website, wsiu.org. Based on the data obtained in the wsiu.org website critique and from the situation analysis, and based on the promotional strategies suggested in the literature review, this section of this paper will also provide suggestions and examples as to how the organization can redesign or supplement its existing pages to better promote the station's services and programming.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the Public Broadcasting Service's (PBS) creation in 1969, there has been a wealth of scholarly inquiry in the subject of PBS and in public media as a whole. Academics, public-media researchers, and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting have, together, developed a wide range of literature on these topics. But within the breadth of literature available on the subject, there has been minimal academic-inquiry into public broadcaster's efforts to promote their programming and services. Within the academic community, there has been even less attention paid to how these broadcasters chose to promote their unique brand, programming, and services on the Internet.

Public broadcasting and public media have been examined from a variety of perspectives and disciplines. Media scholars have examined its history and development in the U.S. and abroad (Day, 1995; Lowe & Hujanen, 2003; Poulsen, 2003), while others scholars have questioned whether or not the service is needed at all (Barsamian, 2001; Poulsen, 2003; Tracey, 1998). Conversely, some have made case that public media contributes to consumer choice and media diversity – which some scholars argue is beneficial to the greater whole of society (Lowe & Hujanen, 2003; McCauley, 2003).

Scholars interested in media economics have focused on how the public broadcasting system is funded - some critical of its heavy reliance on federal funding and underwriting instead of advertising revenue (Avery, 2007; Rose, 2005; Hoynes, 2007). Others have sought to highlight public broadcasting's ability to provide locally produced programming that is reflective of its local and/or regional community identities (Aufderheide, n.d.). Education scholars have contributed to the subject, focusing on public broadcasting's social mission to make art, history, and educational programming accessible to all communities (Aufderheide, n.d; Brooks & Ondrich, 2009; Poulsen, 2003).

A number of academics interested in technology have become interested in how digitalization will effect the traditional public broadcasting model. With the onset of the federal government's mandate for television digitalization, scholars are eager to see how public broadcasters will respond to these changes (Enli, 2008; Clark & Aufderheide, 2009; Hills & Michalis, 2000; Starr, 2003). Scholars are also eager to see how public broadcasters incorporate the Internet into their newly digitalized distribution platforms (Hills& Michalis, 2000; Moe, 2008, Poulsen, 2003, Starr, 2003; Valentine & Powers, 2006).

While academic interest in this subject has been limited, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and a number of other public media organizations have been eager to research this topic (Clark & Aufderheide, 2009; Enli, 2008; Hills and Michalis, 2000). It is my hope that this paper will help to further explore this topic and fill in gaps where academic interest has historically lacked.

Public Broadcasting: A History

Public media encompasses many media sectors and industries and has made its contribution in every traditional broadcasting platform: newspapers, radio, magazines, and television. According to the Center for Social Media, public media, in all its various forms, plays "a central role in our democracy, informing citizens and guiding public conversation (Clark & Aufderheide, 2009)."

Public television, in particular, has played a small role in many of our lives if we grew up watching children's programming like *Sesame Street* and *Mister Rodger's Neighborhood*. The Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) is well known for its commitment to educational children's programming and perhaps that is what Congress and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) initially foresaw when it authorized the service's creation in 1969. As a non-commercial public broadcaster, PBS differentiates itself from commercial broadcasters based on its funding model and, some might argue, its philosophy on programming diversity. Non-commercial broadcasting stations receive all, if not a portion, of their funding from the general public in the form of donations or through membership. In addition to public support, some types of public broadcasting systems may receive their funding from state or federal grants, corporate sponsorships, or via program underwriting from small business and individuals within their communities.

Since the emergence of radio and television there have always been a disjointed network of community broadcasters in some form or another. In 1938,

Congress set-side unused radio bandwidth to be used for educational purposes. Although this initial allotment was not necessarily set aside expressly, for PBS, it was reserved as a means to curb the effects of the commercialization of radio and to create space for educational programming. When Congress passed the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967, it lead to the creation of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting which later founded the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) in 1969, National Public Radio (NPR) in 1972, and finally Public Radio International (PRI) in 1983 (Aufderheide, n.d.). CPB also funds the Independent Television Service and several minority program consortia (representing African-American, Latino, Asian-American, Native-American and Pacific Islander producers), as well as other independent productions.

The Corporation for Public Broadcasting would be established as a private corporation whose main goal would be to provide support to licensed PBS stations and other public media. The Corporation, which was funded by U.S. taxpayer dollars, was created to award grants to PBS-affiliates to help them repair and update equipment, for research and policy direction, and for program development (McLoughlin, 2005).

The Public Broadcasting Service would, like the 1938 reservation of radio space, use unused spectrum space to bring low-cost, local television programming to the masses (Aufderheide, n.d.). Even President Lyndon Johnson recognized the potential for this new type of broadcasting model and looked at PBS as the “television component to the Great Society (Aufderheide, n.d.).” President Johnson thought “public television could help us see America

whole… in all its diversity, and help us know what it is to be many in one, (Aufderheide, n.d.)."

Although both Congress and President Johnson recognized public broadcasting's potential for good, many struggled to come to terms with how to fund the new system. In the article, *The Public Broadcasting Act of 1967: Looking Ahead by Looking Back*, by Robert Avery, the author examines the Public Broadcasting Act and its implications for PBS over the last several decades. Avery makes a point of PBS's perpetual problem: government funding, or the sometimes, lack of government and state funding needed to keep their services on the air.

Public broadcasters, like many other non-profit organizations, have felt the strain stemming from the economic recession and the changing economic environment. While the service does receive additional funding from stations' dues, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, foundations, and from some corporations, stations budgets are shrinking.

In the last five years, the recession has greatly impacted the operating budgets of many PBS stations across the nation. These troubles have been further intensified by the continual decrease of State funding as many States struggle to provide basic public resources. Increasingly, stations must rely on financial support from the private and public sectors. For most PBS stations, these funds are often obtained via fundraising, during pledge drives, or through online donations (Aufderheide, 2011)."

Programming Diversity

While there has been moderate academic research on the history of the Public Broadcasting Service, there is a wealth of academic interest in PBS's impact on childhood literacy and development. Part of PBS's mission is to bring insightful and thought-provoking programming to the masses - regardless of age. The service airs a variety of programming focusing on regional and local communities, the arts, history, childhood literacy, arts and crafts, and world and local news. All of these programming options are provided to the public free of charge via an over-the-air signal that can be picked up by any household.

In the article *How Public Is Public Television,* the authors Brooks and Ondrich, discuss this guiding principal, noting the service's mission of universal access to broadcasting services (Brooks & Ondrich, 2006). In the article they seek to uncover which Americans are using the service and questioned whether or not its viewer's demographic make-up was reflective of the diversity within society. The authors discovered that "some socio-demographic characteristics of viewers… have little significant effect over the likelihood of viewing public television, [while] others - such as higher education levels - strongly push it up (Brooks & Ondrich, 2009)."

Other scholars have focused on how the service has provided an alternative voice amongst commercial broadcaster and how public broadcasting has contributed to program diversity. According to the European Broadcasters Union (EBU), public media and public broadcasting, first and foremost, offer the

general public programming with editorial independence. Furthermore, public broadcasters fill a programming niche for viewers who want coverage of a broad range of issues that were once ignored by cable and satellite broadcasters (Poulsen, 2003). In Patricia Aufderheide's writing for the Museum of Broadcast Communications, she elaborates on this service mission saying, "U.S. public television programming has evolved to fill niches that commercial broadcasters have abandoned or not yet discovered (Aufderheide, n.d.)." Perhaps PBS's greatest programming hallmark is its commitment to media that reflects local and regional communities. According to Aufderheide, "stations are fiercely independent," and some stations develop local productions to showcase the history and originality of their region.

Public Service Broadcasting in the Digital Age

Public broadcasters, like many other commercial and public broadcasters, have had to transition their service structure and distribution method to meet the demands of today's popular technologies. Like broadcasters, the academic community has also questioned how the service will transition in the digital age. A handful of academics and a slough of public media researchers are eager to determine how this transition will occur and have recently contributed to this topic with several papers and reports that seek to examine the impact of digitalization on PBS's television services.

With the passing of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, every television licensee was provided an additional channel to develop digital television

transmission (DTV). According to Jerold Starr, Executive Director of Citizens for Independent Public Broadcasting, “this technology permits high-density television (HDTV), which produces a picture at six times the resolution of today’s standard definition TV (SDTV). Alternatively, the 6Mhz digital channel [can be used instead, to] offer four or more SDTV program streams… at the same time (Starr 2003).” Starr goes on to explain how the digital switch created an opportunity for broadcasters to triple their broadcasting ability and, in turn, create niche-programming options. Starr, reports public broadcasters have estimated the total cost of digitalization at $1.7 billion dollars - $5 million dollars per station (Starr 2003).

Although, costly, Aufderheide see digitalization as an opportunity for public broadcasters to take advantage of the convergence of electronic media to tailor media to consumer desires and preferences (Aufderheide, n.d.). In the 2009 report: *Public Media 2.0: Dynamic, Engaged Publics* performed by the Center for Social Media, authors Clark & Aufderheide continue the discussion of PBS’s digital transition - envisioning the service moving from “a single distribution system to a multi-system service utilizing terrestrial, satellite, cable, internet, digital television set top boxes, mobile phones and other mobile wireless devices (Clark & Aufderheide, 2009).”

PBS: Interactive Online Environments

Any discussion of digitalization will ultimately lead one to a discussion of the Internet. Hallvard Moe weighs in on the issue in his article *Dissemination And*

Dialogue In The Public Sphere: A Case For Public Service Media Online. Moe points out that similar to its mission with its television service, if PBS is going to provide an online platform, it should "both disseminate information and facilitate dialogue" within the community (Moe, 2008). In order to facilitate dialogue in an online environment, PBS stations will need to create dynamic webpages with high levels of interactivity.

When I use the term interactivity, I reference the definition provided by Yeon, Choi, and Kiousis in the article, *Interactive Communication Features on Nonprofit Organizations' Webpages for the Practice of Excellence in Public Relations*. In the article, the authors examined nonprofit organization's websites to see how they utilized the web to attract donors, volunteers, and the media. The authors discussed the concept of interactivity and its many definitions - finally setting on a concept developed by Spiro Kiousis:

> "Interactivity can be defined as the degree to which a communication technology can create a mediated environment in which participants can communicate (one-to-one, one-to-many and many-to-many) and participate in reciprocal message exchanges. With regard to human users, it additionally refers to their ability to perceive the experience as a simulation of interpersonal communication (as cited in Yeon, Choi, & Kiousis, 2007, p. 68)."

Interactivity was an especially relevant theme for researchers interested in public broadcaster's efforts to promote their programming and services on the

Internet. Hills and Michalis addressed this issue in their article, *The Internet: A Challenge to Public Service Broadcasting.* Their work provided an analysis of PBS websites and a discussion of how each provides an interactive online experience. The authors see interactivity as a way for broadcasters to increase viewer loyalty, increase the sales of program-related or station-branded products, as a way to gather and strengthen feedback and increase the station's own accountability (Hills and Michalis, 2000). Gunn Enli performed a similar study in the article *Redefining Public Service Broadcasting Multi-Platform Participation* - looking at the communicative online relationships between public broadcasters and their viewers. In this study, Enli examined both PBS and European broadcasters: British BBC, the Swedish SVT, and the Norwegian NRK. Enli's results confirmed interactivity as a major factor in determining a successful website (Enli, 2008).

While much of the literature confirms interactivity as a user preference on the web, other scholars have sought to uncover which features and conditions create a positive web experience and successful web environment.

Search engine optimization (SEO) was another common theme in most literature. In the article *Achieving Seamless Website Transformation: Promotional Implications of Static versus Dynamic Websites* the author, Paul Christ examines the impact of search engine promotion efforts as websites are transitioned from a static to dynamic environments. Overall, he endorses the benefits of dynamic webpages saying they offer a "means for conveniently creating and maintaining site design, site content, and other information; [and

provides] mechanisms to allow for detailed tracking of website visitors activity and behavior (Christ, 2005).” Thakur and Summey further expound on this topic in their piece, *An Exploratory Study of the Factors That Influence the Usage or Non-Usage of Websites*. In this piece the authors looked for predictors for online activity looking to see which factors would encourage or discourage activity. What public broadcasters can take away from this study are the authors’ findings on personal security. While most users weren’t discouraged from e-commerce, the “findings suggest a positive relationship between personal security concern and accessibility to personal information” like credit or debit card information (Thakur & Summey, 2005).

While interactivity and security fell high on the list, navigation does not lag far behind. A successful website should allow the users to move throughout the site and easily access information (Lepkowska-White and Eifler, 2008).

Perhaps the most useful research on public broadcaster’s efforts to utilize the internet for promotion and community-building lies in the Corporation for Public Broadcasting’s report *Embracing Digital: A Review Of Public Media Efforts Across The United States*. The study, performed by Gupta Consulting, LLC on behalf of CPB, highlighted public broadcaster’s efforts to incorporate blogs, e•newsletters and RSS feeds into their web-based communications. Furthermore, the study revealed that custom web pages were not the norm for these stations. As far as interactivity was concerned, the study found that discussion forums were more prevalent among broadcasters such as NPR and PBS. Concerning streaming video, the study reveals stations mostly relied on

third•party sites to stream video rather than streaming directly from the station's webpage (CPB, 2009). More information on the subject can be obtain from the report, *How A Non-Profit Media Company Profits From Building Open Source Online Publishing Platform*, published by WNET: Thirteen and Tierra Innovations. This report recount the journey WNET undertook to develop a new website on the WordPress Multi-user platform.

Considerations for Joint-License PBS/NPR Stations

Not all PBS/NPR station affiliates are created equal. Some affiliates just stream television content while others focus strictly on radio. Other stations, joint-licensees PBS/NPR stations, broadcast both. University-joint licensee PBS/NPR broadcasters are especially different because of their unique needs concerning co-branding with their affiliated university.

Authors Jeffrey Veen and Lane Becker expound on this issue in the *PBS Best Practices Report.* The report, which was conducted in 2003, surveyed fourteen joint-licensee stations across the nation. The goal of the survey was to obtain data regarding user expectations and behavior for a joint-licensee station website. In addition the observations I listed above, the authors' report highlighted several ways in which joint-licensee website viewers differed from viewers visiting television-only sites.

As mentioned above, and also agreed upon by the authors, joint-licensee station website's content must cater to the needs of both radio and television viewers. The authors also point out that depending on the medium a user is

interested in, he or she will have different expectations for the content they are looking for. Veen and Becker found that several differences between viewers who came to the site looking for television and viewers who wanted information related to radio. According to the authors, television-oriented audiences tended to be more attached to specific TV programs compared to radio listeners, who tended to listen when the opportunity arose (in the car or streaming online during their lunch break for example). The authors also noted joint-licensee stations also reported a great deal of interest in community outreach pages related to TV content – especially for children's programming (Veen & Becker, 2003).

Another issues exposed in the report addressed branding concerns. According to the authors, these types of stations must deal with a number of competing brands and logos on their sites. For many stations this involves the placement of station logos, program titles and logos, network logos, funding logos, and channel numbers – which can often turn into logo graffiti and compete for the user's attention on the page. Furthermore, university joint-licensee PBS/NPR stations must also factor in logo usage for their partnering university.

Perhaps the author's most valuable contribution comes from their discussion of the "branch page." Many stations have gotten into the habit of segregating their homepages - send visitors to either television or radio. The authors see this type of organization scheme as a missed opportunity for promotion. According the Veen and Becker, the "homepage is the highest trafficked page on your site and the best opportunity you have to introduce your audience to a wide range of Web offerings. Don't squander this. Instead, use this

space to highlight the best information your station has to offer." The authors advise stations to create a space on the homepage where they can aggregate both radio and television programming to create a seamless online experience. Ideally, this space should combine programming from all of the station digital channel options as well. This space could also promote community outreach activities that are related to television or radio programming.

PBS: Using Social Media to Connect

Every good promotions professional knows that web-promotion does not stop at the company's webpage. Web-based promotions encompass a vast variety of outlets including social media, blogs, and user-generated video/photo sites.

In its most basic form, social networks have been around since the early 90's – as evidenced by AOL chat rooms, online discussion forums, and the magic of instant messaging. Social network have evolved from these humble beginnings to become media juggernauts in their own right. The increased interest in modern day social networks can be attributed to a number of factors, some of which include the continued development of wireless phone/PDA technologies and increases in computer sales. Since the 90's, the communication and computer industries have changed dramatically, offering consumers a new wealth of devices to receive broadcasts. Consumers are now able to stream video on their laptop, computer, or PDA, instantly connect with

friends, and even teleconference for free. Today's consumers demand interactivity - and that is the point where social networks excel.

Today's most popular social media destinations include: Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, MySpace, LinkedIn, Flickr and WordPress. Through social networks**,** people can connect with friends and causes, spread information, and share information about themselves. Most social networking websites also offer additional features such as blogs and forums where members discuss issues and events, watch or upload videos, and create user profiles. According to Michael Stelzner author of the *2009 Social Media Marketing Industry Report*, eighty-eight percent of marketers are using social media to connect with the public (Stelzner, 2009). Other researchers agree - non-profit organizations especially need to hold a presence on many of these new media platforms. Clemons, Barnett, and Appadurai examined social media in their paper, *The Future of Advertising and The Value of Social Network Websites: Some Preliminary Examinations*, questioning the value of social networks. The authors note that consumer's demands for media are changing. Consumers are transitioning form traditional televised media, and opting for Internet streams or watching broadcasts via new technologies such as iPods, smart phones, and via gaming consoles. In order to stay relevant in the minds of consumers, public broadcasters will need to provide programming for these distribution platforms as well (Clemons, et al, 2007). While some individuals enjoy the feeling of community that social networks provide, research has shown that the public feels more trust for information that comes from traditional media like television and

radio, rather than blogs. In the article *An Updated Look at the Impact of Social Media on Public Relations Practice* by Donald Wright and Michelle Hinson, the authors explore the impact that blogs and other social media are having on public relations practice today. Their study reveals that consumers prefer traditional news media and sees television and radio as a more reliable news source in comparison to blogs and social media (Wright & Hinson, 2009). Blogs, however, can serve as a means for exploring issues and opinions within the community and sharing stories.

Perhaps the most useful function social media holds for public broadcasters is its ability to quickly disseminate information to targeted publics and create groundswell. Social media allows others to act as your organization's ambassador - sharing information along the way. According to Li and Bernoff, groundswell refers to the, "social trend in which people use technologies to get things they need from each other, rather than from traditional institutions like corporations (Li & Bernoff, 2008)." The authors also go on to say that groundswell often happens slowly and stems from the "collision of three forces: people, technology, and economics (Li & Bernoff, 2008)." The term also lends itself to the social phenomena where the public is able to gather information and garner support for or an organization or issue using social media technologies. Through these mediums, people are able to find strength in numbers, share information, and affect change.

A simple review of the academic literature encompassing the field of public media reveals public broadcasting as a multi-faceted industry in the

middle of an important transition. The transition to digital television ushered in more programming and channels options for many broadcasters, and now, they must make the decision as to how, or if, they will utilize the web to promote their new wealth a programming and services. The Internet is poised to provide an additional broadcast platform and serve as an excellent promotional tool if the industry can capitalize on it. Broadcasters can tap into social media to build “groundswell” for their organization and to garner support on issues related to their organization. Furthermore, tapping into the online groundswell through social media and dynamic web environments can present broadcasters with new opportunities to promote their services and learn about their viewers/listeners.

CHAPTER III

WSIU SITUATION ANALYSIS

In order to successfully critique WSIU Public Broadcasting's website, wsiu.org, I will perform a situation analysis of the station to determine how the organization develops content for the web. This analysis will also incorporate input from WSIU staff regarding the changes they would like to see on the website.

About WSIU Public Broadcasting

WSIU Public Broadcasting is a university-joint licensee PBS/NPR station affiliate located in Carbondale, IL and licensed to the Southern Illinois University Board of Trustees. WSIU is integrated into the university's College of Mass Communication and Media Arts where it broadcasts a combination of PBS, original, and student-produced programming. In addition to its television delivery stream, the station also operates three radio channels, WSIU 91.1, WUSI 90.3 and WVSI 88.9, which service a half of million listeners in over 38 counties throughout the Midwest region.

WSIU offers a variety of services and televised programming streams. The station broadcasts to over a million households within southern Illinois, Missouri, Indiana and Kentucky. In addition to their over-the-air channel WSIU TV 8, the station operates three digital program streams: WSIU HD, WSIU World and WSIU Create, each of which focuses on niche programming.

While not every PBS affiliate is able to develop local productions, WSIU has been fortunate enough to have a well-respected local production unit. The station produces several television and radio programs. WSIU TV is responsible for producing *WSIU InFocus*, which focuses on the people and places of southern Illinois, and *Scholastic Hi-Q*, a high-school quiz show. WSIU also helps develop student-produced programs such as *Studio A Presents*, *River Region Evening Edition*, and *alt.news 26:46*. In addition to their regular local programming, each fall the station broadcasts select Saluki Basketball games. During election season, the station partners with other media organizations to broadcast Gubernatorial and Senate debates via the program *Illinois Lawmakers and WSIU InFocus* formats. The organization has also produced several documentaries, which include *The Legend of Charlie Birger* and *Artifacts & Heavy Timber: The Reconstruction of Fort Massac*.

WSIU is widely known for its local radio productions. *Celtic Connections* spearheads the organization's radio programming as a nationally syndicated production. Besides *Celtic Connections*, the station produces *Morning Conversations*, *Sunrise Sports*, local news segments, and special programming such as *Reading Baseball* and *In the Author's Voice*.

In addition to its television and radio broadcasts, the station provides a variety of services which include the Southern Illinois Radio Information Service (SIRIS), a reading services for the visually and print-impaired. In addition to SIRIS, WSIU has developed a vast community outreach service with a sole mission to increase childhood education, create professional development

opportunities for adults, and highlight the peoples and histories of southern Illinois.

A staff of less than fifty individuals and a number of student employees operates the service on a day-to-day basis. An advisory panel, The Friends Board, provides a roundtable of support for the organization.

Within the last two years, the organization has sought to implement a branding campaign to raise awareness about its programming and services. The campaign, titled *Powered by You*, not only emphasizes the organization's focus on the people, places, and histories of the southern Illinois region, but also draws attention their operational structure that relies on a vast network of volunteers and student employees to provide the service in all its capacities. This campaign features a combination of print and web advertisements, on-air testimonials, and a webpage devoted to showcasing how the station has impacted the communities around them.

PBS Promotion

In order to make sure all its licensees have similar messaging, PBS has established on online promotion center, PBS PressRoom. This area serves has an online resource for PBS member stations to gather information needed for program promotion. PBS PressRoom provides managers with press releases, program descriptions, schedule information, photos, publicist contact information and other materials, all which can be localized to suit the individual station.

In addition to PBS PressRoom, member stations like WSIU rely on PBS Interactive to provide the resources and tools needed to customize and localize webpages. PBS Interactive also provides tools to help stations connect with the public via social media. PBS Interactives include Bill Moyers Journal: Blog, MediaShift, NOW: Feedback Forum, PBS Teachers: learning.now, and the PBS Kids Democracy Project. In total, PBS Interactive provides 16 interactive online environments to help stations facilitate communication with viewers via the web. Each of these resources is meant to continue the conversation with viewers and serve as an opportunity to take programming beyond broadcast and into the tangible life of the viewer.

Many PBS stations, including WSIU, rely on the Public Platform™ Core Package as their online content management system. Public Interactive, LLC, which produces Public Platform™, is public broadcasting's foremost developer of online tools and services. Public Platform™ is a template-driven CMS system that provides regular updates of station playlists and schedules, current broadcasts, and breaking news. WSIU also uses Public NewsRoom® and Public Events® to mange the content on their radio and community pages. Public NewsRoom® allows stations to easily manage local news and news provided by international source like Reuters and the British Broadcasting System (BBC). Public Events® provides the station with a powerful online calendar used to promote local and regional community events. Unlike open-source CMS like Drupal, Joomla, and Word Press, there is a fee associated with the Public Platform™ Core Package.

PBS and NPR have recently provided additional resources to help member stations get involved with social media. PBS Connect helps stations increase their knowledge about social media tools and practices, while PBS Engage give stations tools to help them gather user-generated comments and create customized slideshows based on photos posted on Flickr.

WSIU has tapped into social media groundswell and has developed Facebook pages for both its television and radio channels, the Raising Readers initiatives and for its Sunrise Sports radio program. The station has developed a Twitter page as well. WSIU has not made an organized effort to post any of its local productions on video-sharing channels like YouTube. The only exceptions are videos posted on YouTube by students from *River Region Evening Edition* and *alt.new 26:46*.

WSIU Staff Interview Results

In order to get a better idea of how WSIU manages wsiu.org, I held a meeting with several WSIU staff members. The meeting, which took place July 28, 2010 in the WSIU promotion office was attended by WSIU station manager, Greg Petrowich; WSIU Promotion Coordinator, Monica Tichenor, and Rodger Suski, the station's IT manager/webmaster. In the meeting we discussed changes they would like to implement on the site and developed use case scenarios for site's most basic functions.

When I use the term use case, I refer to the term used by Michael Swanson in the article *Use Case Design for Websites*. Swanson defines use

case as, “a detailed, written description of a user’s interaction with a system or application to accomplish one simple task. Generally, use-cases are titled with the name of the action the user is accomplishing. For instance, a use-case title might be something like “User orders a product” (Swanson, 2005).” Use case analysis is very useful in identifying a sites most basic functions and a establishing a hierarchy of information.

According to WSIU staff, the most import functions of the website were to: disseminate information about local and national programs, provide access to television and radio schedules, provided a community calendar to connect with the public, provide live streams and on demand video of their programming, facilitate opportunities for donations, provide contact information to the public and press, provide access to information about PBS TeacherLine and PBS Kids games.

Content for wsiu.org is prepared by the promotions department and manipulated and repurposed for the web. Roger Suski is responsible for updating the site and implements almost all of WSIU’s web-based promotions.

During this meeting WSIU staff also discussed wanting to change the overall appearance and aesthetics of the website. Overall, staff talked about expanding the page size beyond 900 pixels, de-cluttering and organizing the homepage into sections based on subject or categories, and placing a greater emphasis on local programs and the organization’s professional development initiatives. The organization’s promotions coordinator, Monica Tichenor also

discussed wanting to establish a station-wide content depot to recycle promotions for the web and foster efficiency.

In another meeting held with WSIU Outreach Coordinator, Beth Spezia in the WSIU promotion office on November 29, 2010, she revealed that she would also like to see changes in the WSIU Kids and Learning pages. Overall, she would like to see the WSIU Kids page completely redesigned to include better access to the photo gallery. She also mentioned that the outreach department hosts many events throughout the community but only of fraction of the photos for these events are available online. She also had concerns about children's outreach's visibility, or lack of visibility, on the homepage.

Toward the end of 2010, the stations made changes to its website to reflect some of the concerns discuss in the meeting.

CHAPTER IV

OBSERVATIONAL RESEARCH

In order to gain a more accurate understanding of the user's experience, I conducted a 30-minute observational study with SIU students to see how different sets of individuals interacted with the site wsiu.org. The observation aimed to determine the site's overall usefulness and functionality and to identify user behaviors.

Sample

The subjects who participated in the study were comprised of five college students, ages 18-52, who were first-time visitors to wsiu.org.

Methodology

Each participant's experience was recorded - noting any difficulties and/or issues they might have encountered while navigating throughout the site. Each participant was timed in increments of 15 seconds to see how long it took them to complete the task. Participants were only assisted when they specifically asked for help.

The tasks each participant were asked to perform were derived from the use case scenarios developed by WSIU staff. As discussed by staff, the site's most basic use case scenarios were to allow users to: access information about local and national programs, access television and radio schedules, access the

community calendar, provide opportunities to listen to radio or watch video online, provide contact information, facilitate opportunities for donations, and to provide access to resources for PBS TeacherLine and children's outreach.

Limitations

Students participated in this study on December 2, 2010, before WSIU made changes to several of its webpages. Participant's observations may reference pages or layouts that have since been changed.

Research Results

While my research grid show evidence that the participants were able to successfully complete many of the use case scenarios within 0-30 seconds, the discussion portion of my observational research will mainly focus on areas where participants struggled to complete the task. I believe it is these areas that warrant the greatest attention and have the most potential to create an improved users experience (See Table 1).

Table 1:

Observational Research Study - Participant Response Grid

Interview Questions - Observational Research	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4	Participant 5	Average
Find the station's television schedule. What comes on WSIU World tonight at 8pm?	30	30	120	60	90	66
Look up information about WSIU Radio's music broadcasts. What song played on air an hour ago?	60	90	45	30	300	105
Look up the station's contact information. Find the WSIU fax number.	10	30	30	20	30	24
Read posts on the site's community calendar. Can you find the link to add an event? What events are happening on Friday?	30	60	30	20	60	40
Read new stories from WSIU Radio. What are today's Top Stories?	30	60	30	120	45	57
Find a press release posted within the last two weeks.	30	30	30	180	30	60
In what area would you find online children's games?	30	30	30	60	30	36
Where can you find information about the switch to digital television?	10	30	30	30	30	26
Look up information about volunteering with WSIU.	45	30	90	300	30	99
View photos of local outreach events.	360	330	240	360	300	318
Find the contact information for PBS Teacherline.	30	30	30	180	30	60
Watch the 2010 Democratic Primary Debate.	60	30	120	300	240	150
Find information about how to donate to WSIU. Can you find information about the canvas bag Thank you gift or the copper travel mug?	60	420	80	60	90	142
Can you find a list of student job openings?	300	60	30	240	120	150
Find a list and description of WSIU's Holiday Programs or Native American Heritage Month programs.	60	240	120	360	60	168

Most prominently, my research reveals users were having difficulty accessing certain areas of the site. Participants had a problem finding and viewing the 2010 Gubernatorial Debate (See Figure 1). The data revealed only two of the five participants were able to locate the debate in under a minute. The remaining 3 participants took between 2 to 4 minutes to locate the debate.

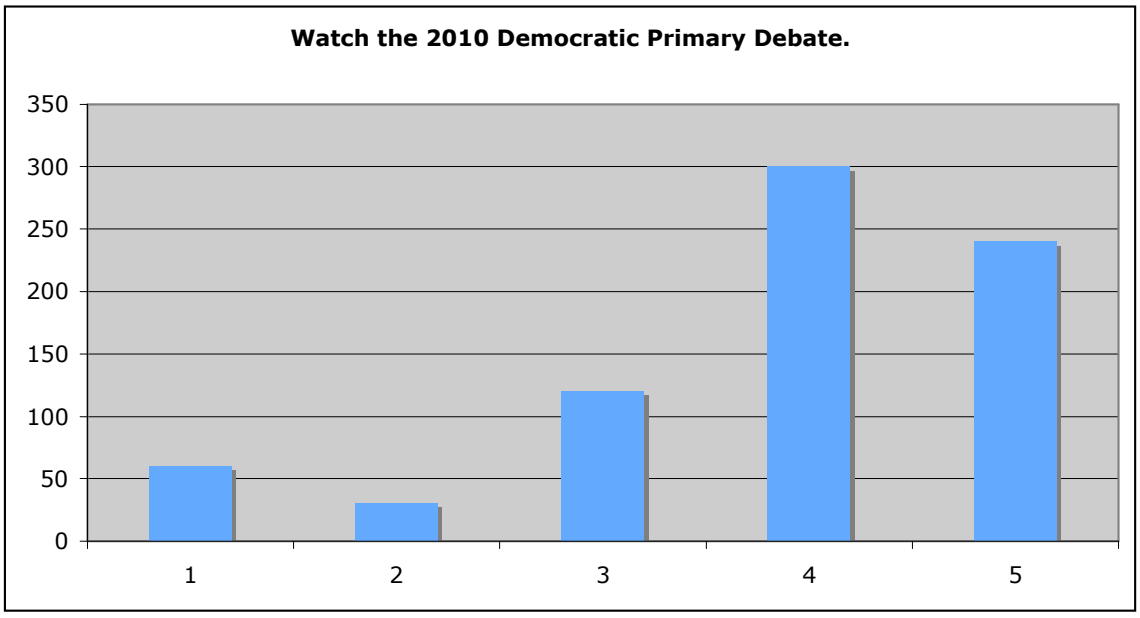


Figure 1: Participant Observation – Watch the Video of the 2010 Generational Debate

Additionally, participants had issues viewing photos of local outreach events and struggled to find WSIU's Cultural Heritage Month programs and holiday features. It took the participants an average of five minutes to locate the children's media gallery (Figure 2).

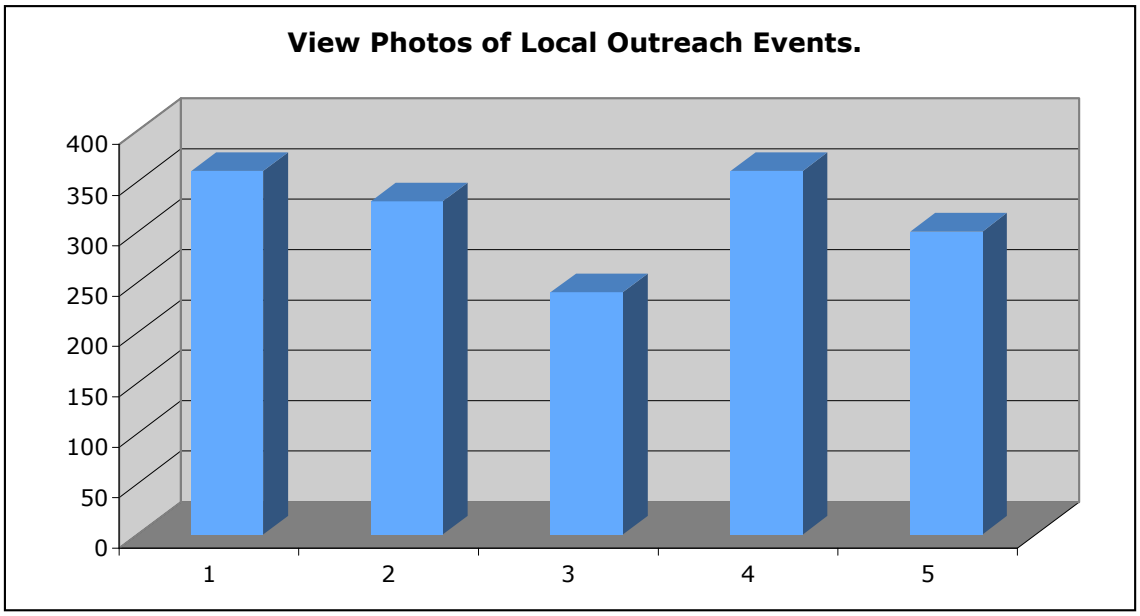


Figure 2: Participant Observation – Find Photos of Local Children's Outreach Events

Several participants had problems accessing the cultural heritage month programs and holiday features. Many responded that they overlooked the features because they were embedded in the slideshow module and not available directly from the landing pages (Figure 3).

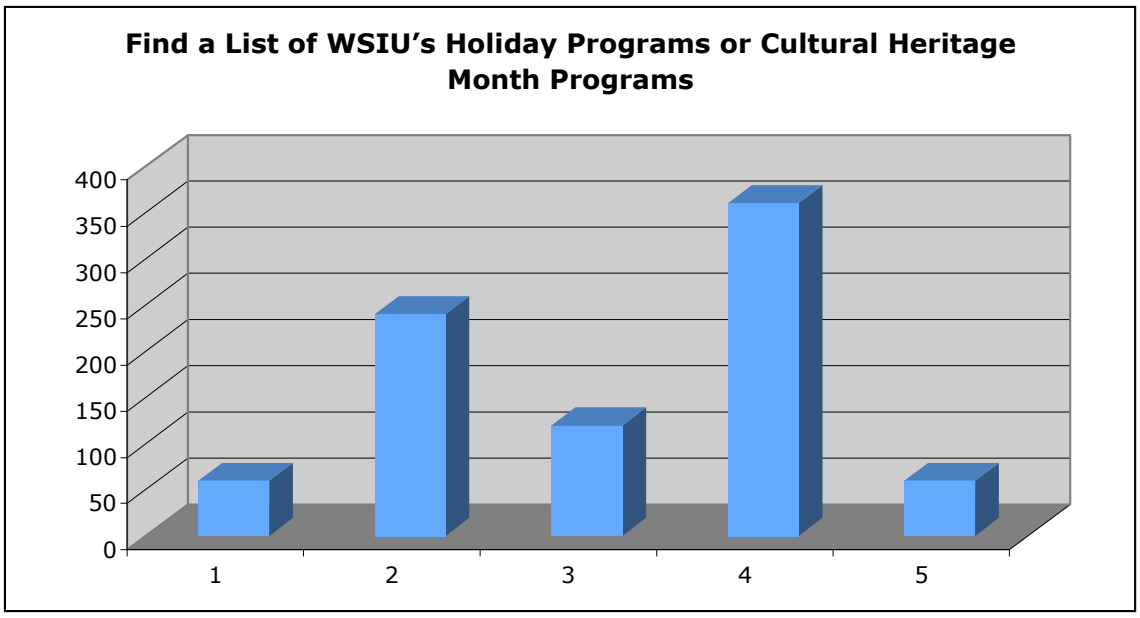


Figure 3: Participant Observation – Find a Description of Holiday Programs or Cultural Heritage Month Programs

My research also reveals issues with other areas of the site as well. Several participants had problems accessing the "thank you" items on the Membership page. When participant where asked to locate a drop-down menu featuring a list of thank you items for new members, many were unable to locate the thank gift selections because of spacing issues. In total, three of the five research participants were unable to locate the option to select a thank you gift.

It took the remaining participants an average of one minute and thirty seconds to locate the thank you gift options (Figure 4).

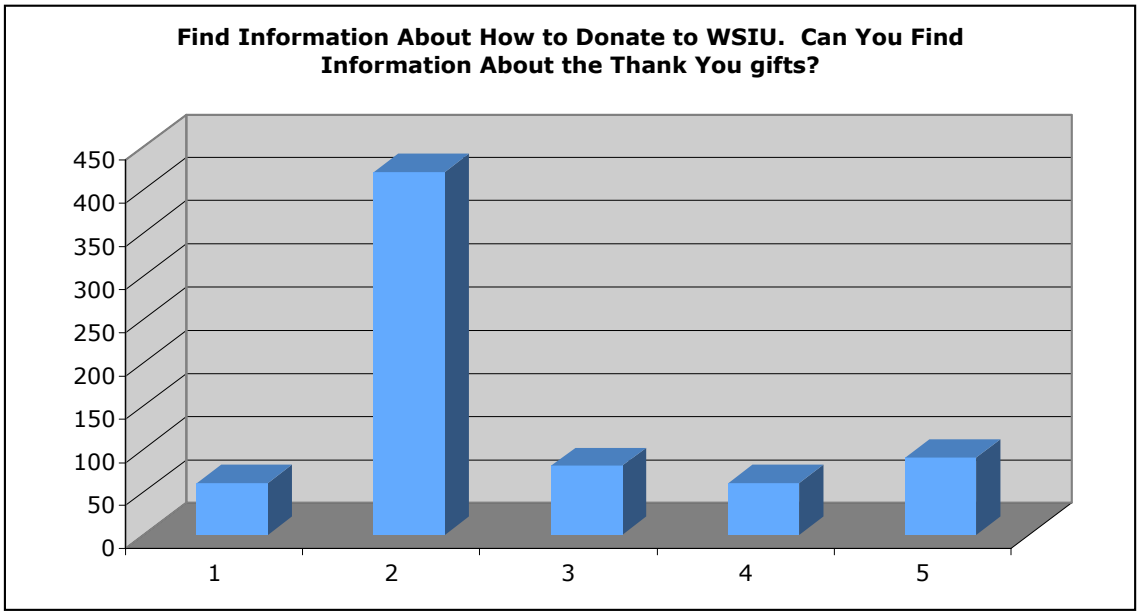


Figure 4: Participant Observation – Where Do You Find Information About How to Donate to WSIU

In addition to certain features on the Membership page, participants also had trouble accessing the volunteer page. I think the confusion pertaining to this question stems from a vocabulary issue rather than page design. Most participants searched the site looking for the term “student jobs” instead of “volunteer.” Two of the five respondents also suggested moving the volunteer navigation tab above the fold. The participants also reported that the navigation location on the bottom of the page might have delayed them in quickly accessing the information (Figure 5).

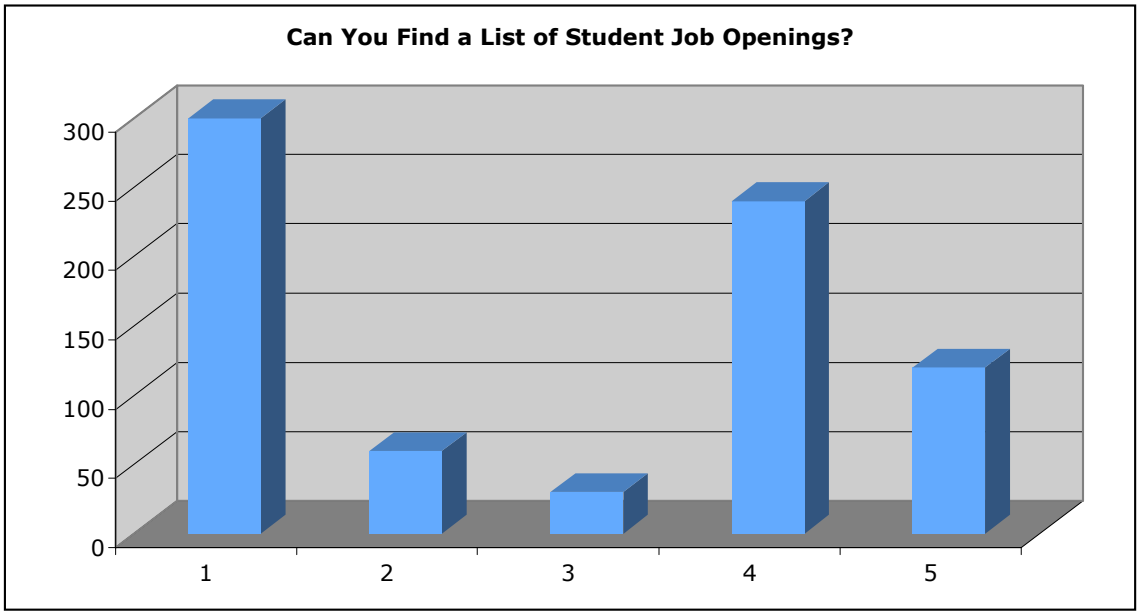


Figure 5: Participant Observation – Find Information About Student Jobs/ Volunteering

Participants had no trouble gaining access to the television schedules or contact information. Participants were also able to easily access WSIU Radio Top Stories and local and world news. The participants took less than a minute on average to locate these items. Participants did, however, have trouble accessing the playlists from programs that previously aired (Figure 6).

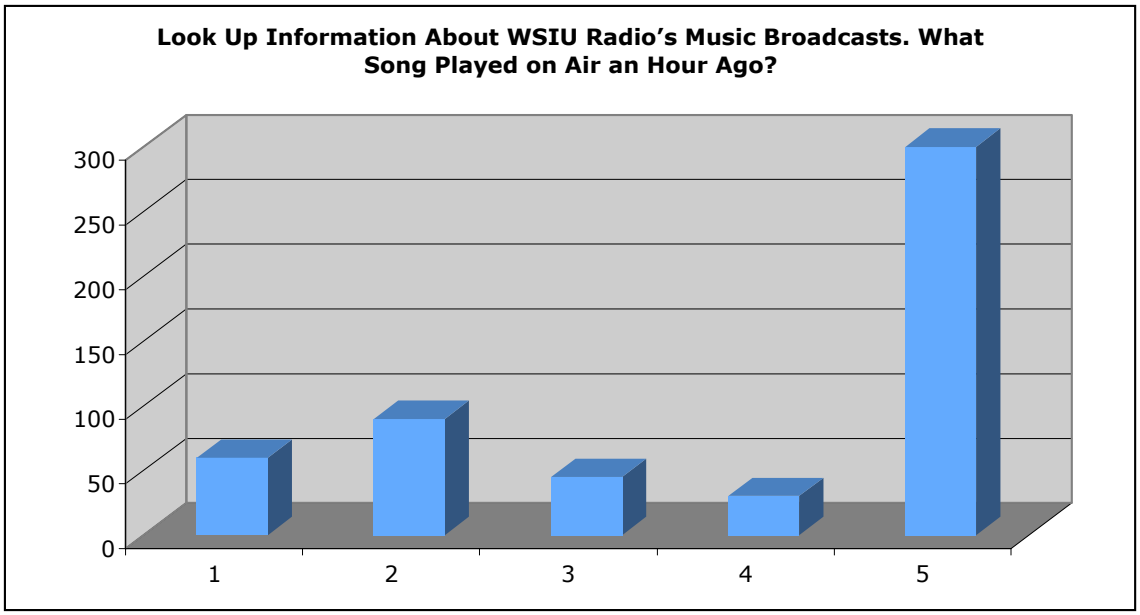


Figure 6: Participant Observation – Find Information About WSIU Radio Broadcast/What Song Played An Hour Ago?

Concerning the website's overall aesthetics, most participants reported that they felt some of the pages were too cluttered. All respondents commented on issues regarding the sites line-spacing and several suggested the addition of more white space between the various modules. Several participants expressed the need for a sitemap or a detailed footer.

One of the more surprising finding regarded the site's navigation. Most users had problems using the navigation and all respondents noted that there were options on the land-pages that were not on the drop-down navigation and visa versa.

SWOT Analysis

Based on the observational research and a general critique of the website, I have developed a SWOT Analysis to help WSIU Public Broadcasting identify the site's strength and weaknesses. Additionally, the SWOT chart also outlines opportunities for changes and highlights issues that could become possible treats in the future (Figure 7).

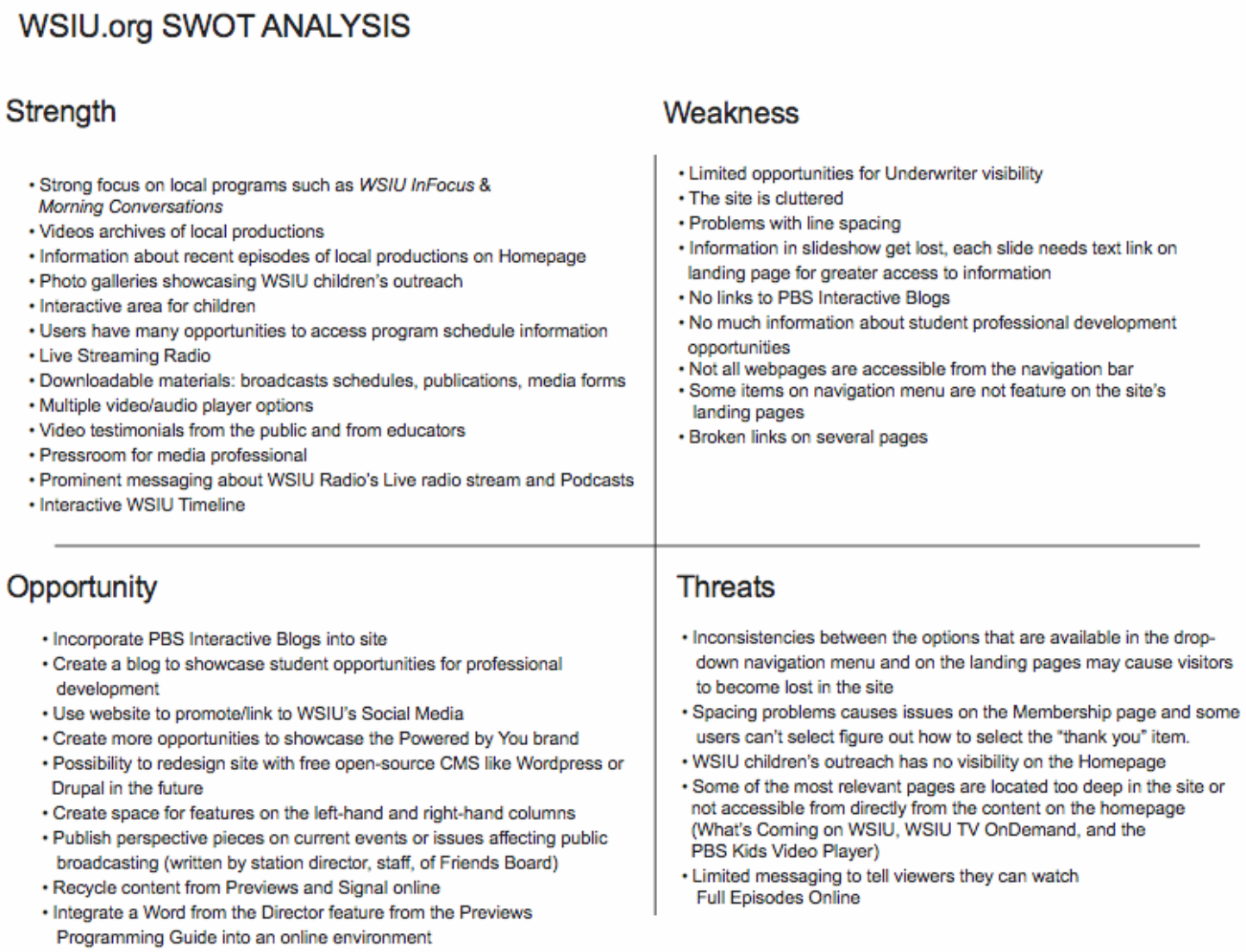


Figure 7: WSIU.org SWOT Analysis

CHAPTER V

WSIU.ORG WEBSITE CRITIQUE

Based on the information exposed in the literature review, we understand that public broadcasters will need to develop dynamic online environments to successfully promote their products and services. We also learned that social media will need to play a larger role in public broadcaster's web-based promotions. From the situation analysis we have established that PBS and NPR has developed several online-communication packages such as PBS Interactive and PBS Engage and the Public Platform™ content management system (CMS) to help most PBS stations adapt content for the web.

In the following section I will attempt to identify how one public broadcaster is utilizing these communication resources to promote their services on the web. In the following section I will provide of a critique of wsiu.org, the website operated by WSIU Public Broadcasting. While the critique will focus on an overall analysis of the site, I will pay close attention to several factors. These factors include: interactivity, navigation, layout and organization, local program promotion, underwriter visibility and multimedia.

The analysis will begin with an overview of the website noting its basic page design, organization, and site structure (See Figure 8). I will also make suggestions as to how the station can reconfigure the page layout to create additional opportunities for public relations and underwriter visibility.

Figure 8: www.wsiu.org sitemap

WSIU.org Sitemap (all)

ONDEMAND
- Morning Conversations
- WSIU InFocus Archive
- WSIU TV OnDemand
  - As Seen On WSIU InFocus
  - Browse Segments By Airdate
  - WSIU InFocus WSIU InFocus Segment
  - Detail Alphabetical Listing of Segments
  - Digital TV Info & Television Production Services
  - PBS Program Promos
- Listen Live - WSIU Radio
- PBS Video Player (Beta)
- What's Coming on PBS?
- PBS Kids Video Player
- SIUC iTunesU

TELEVISION
- WSIUInFocus
  - DTV Information
  - What's Coming on PBS?
  - TV Services
  - Scholastic Hi-Q
  - WSIU InFocus
  - Program Schedule Grid
  - Alphabetical Program Listing
  - Honor & Sacrifice
  - Satellite Uplink /Contract Production / Facility Rental
- We Shall Remain
- Digital Television
  - WSIU DTV Blog
- Scholastic Hi-Q
  - Home
  - Rules
  - Scores and Match up Bracket
  - Taping Schedules
- History Connector
  - Visit Southern Illinois museums
  - We Shall Remain
  - Honor & Sacrifice: WSIU Remembers World War II
- OnDemand
- Feedback
- Complete Program List
- Full Program Schedule
- Report Caption Problem

RADIO
- School Closings
- Morning Conversations
- Black History Month Programming
- Celtic Connections
  - Home
  - Current Playlist
  - Quarterly Playlists
  - Playlist Archive
  - Affiliate Stations
  - Be an Underwriter
  - Meet the Host
  - The Album of the Year
- WSIU Radio Newsroom
  - Local WSIU
  - Top Stories
  - School Closings
  - Black History Month
  - Decision 2010
  - Community Calendar
  - Sports
  - World
  - Business
  - Science
  - Learning
  - Arts & Culture
  - Opinion
  - Weather
  - The Economy Project
  - Buzzerator
  - Local H1N1 Coverage
  - US
- Listen Live
- WSIU Radio Featured Media
  - Featured Media
  - Programs
  - Podcasts
  - Help
- Radio Voices: The Storytellers
  - Storytellers Selections 2010
  - Storytellers Selections 2009
  - What is a Storytelling Festival (video)
  - Storytelling as a Profession (video)
  - Photo Gallery
  - Cape Girardeau Storytelling Festival
- In The Author's Voice
  - Arts Index
  - Columns
  - Classical
  - Jazz
  - Pop
  - Books
  - TV
  - Headlines
  - Movies
  - People
  - Programs
  - Radio
  - Theater
- Sounds Like Radio
  - Home
  - About The Host
  - Program Logos/Photos
  - Playlists
  - News
  - Music Submissions
  - Contact
- WSIU Podcasts
  - Featured Media
  - Programs
  - Podcasts
  - Help
- Community Calendar Feature
  - Local News
  - Local Arts
  - Arts Index
  - Columns
  - Classical
  - Jazz
  - Pop
  - Books
  - TV
  - Headlines
  - Movies
  - People
  - Programs
  - Radio

SIRIS
- Become a Volunteer (broken link)
- SIRIS Schedule
- Request a SIRIS Radio
  - Photo Gallery
  - Volunteer Profiles
  - Contribute to SIRIS (broken link)
    - Profile Archive
    - Home
    - View SIRIS Schedule
    - Download SIRIS Schedule
    - Request a SIRIS Schedule

LEARNING
- WSIU Kids/Raising Readers
  - Activities
  - Raising Readers
  - Share a Story
  - Media Gallery
  - Reading Rainbow
  - PBS Kids Links
  - Contact us
  - Home
- WSIU Parents
  - PBS Parents
  - Ready to Learn
- For Teachers
  - See what local educators are - saying about WSIU!
  - PBS Teachers
  - PBS Teacherline Online Professional Development
- PBS Teacherline
  - Home
  - About
  - Courses
  - Benefits
  - FAQ
  - Standards Based
  - Facilitated Learning
  - Community
  - Contact
  - Teacherline Video
- For Parents
- Community
  - NCO: National Center for Outreach
  - History Connector
    - Visit Southern Illinois museums
    - We Shall Remain
    - Honor & Sacrifice: WSIU Remembers World War II
- PBS Kids GO! Writing Contest
  - Main
  - Writing
  - Guide Prizes
  - Entry Form
  - Rules
  - Reading Rainbow Archive
- PBS Kids Video Player
  - PBS Kids Come Play
  - Ready to Learn
  - Raising Readers (labeled WSIU KIDS on drop-down navigation)

SUPPORT
- Become a Member
  - Membership
  - Planned Giving (link inactive)
  - Underwriting
  - Volunteering
- Corporate Support

EVENTS
- Event Calendar
- Submit an Event

INSIDE WSIU
- About Us
  - About WSIU Public Broadcasting
  - Our History
  - Timeline
  - Publications
  - Awards
- Contact Us
- Media Update Form
- Pressroom
  - Home
  - Media Announcements
  - Station Identifiers
  - Photos
  - Standard Release Forms
  - Media Update Form
- FCC Form 388
- EEO Listing
- Careers

PRESSROOM
- Home
- Media Announcements
- Station Identifiers
- Publications
- Media Update Form

HOME

CONTACT

CUSTOMER SERVICE

PRESSROOM

PRIVATE POLICY

CAREERS

VOLUNTEERS

Figure 8: www.wsiu.org sitemap – continued

Based on the data obtained from the observational research and based on the promotional strategies suggested in the literature review, the final section of this paper will provide a critique of, and provide suggestions and examples as

to how the organization can redesign or supplement its existing pages to better promote the station's services and programming.

Generally, the site's major issues fall into three categories: graphic design issues, site architecture or navigation issues, and issues with content.

Graphic Design

I would like to see several revisions to the overall structure and appearance of wsiu.org. Some of these changes involve the expansion of the page width, the adjustment of line spacing, and inconsistent page design.

I would begin by widening the page beyond 900 pixels, and then I would address the issues with line spacing across the entire site. Not only has WSIU staff indicated that they would like to see the site's page width widened, but I also agree that this would be a good idea. Widening the site will allow for more room on each page and help solve some of the site's spacing issues. Regarding spacing, in many places the line spacing is too close and the padding between objects too tight. This is leading to a cluttered look and feel. Issues with line spacing also caused significant problems for some participants in the observational research study. When participant where asked to locate a drop-down menu featuring a list of thank you items for new members, many were unable to locate the thank gift selections because of spacing issues. In total, three of the five research participants were unable to locate the option to select a thank you gift. These participants reported they were unable to locate the thank you gifts because the drop-down selection was spaced too closely to a graphic

on the page. Because of this spacing issue, many participants simply overlooked the drop-down menu. It took the remaining participants an average of one minute and thirty seconds to locate the thank you gift options (See Figure 9).

Figure 9: Screen shot of wsiu.org Membership webpage

I see this as major issue for WSIU because this problem could discourage people from making donations online.

Another graphic design issue regards the overall page design throughout the website. While most pages follow a consistent theme, several pages do disrupt the consistency of the page design. The WSIU Kids/Raising Readers webpage and the WSIU Community webpages both feature page designs used from older versions of wsiu.org. Additionally, the page design for the WSIU Community page feature outdated WSIU logos (See Figure 10 and Figure 11).

Figure 10: Screen shot of wsiu.org WSIU Kids/Raising Readers webpage

Figure 11: Screen shot of wsiu.org WSIU Community webpage

Site Structure/Navigation

In addition to design issues, wsiu.org also has problems concerning the site's navigation and site structure. The site has issues regarding broken or mis-labeled links and also has inconsistencies regarding the information that is available on the global navigation drop-down menu and the site's landing pages.

Broken Links.

First, WSIU needs to address the site's broken links. While there are several broken links throughout the website, I am most concerned with the broken links on the Support WSIU and SIRIS webpages.

The Support WSIU section of wsiu.org specifically has issues with broken links on its membership sub-page. On the sub-page, if users click on the 'Membership' text link in the center of the page to request more information about becoming a membership and making a donation, they are directed to an error page. Furthermore, information about WSIU membership can only be accessed via the text links located on the left-hand column of the page and via the drop-down navigation options (See Figure 9).

There are also issues with several broken text links on the SIRIS-landing page. Similarly to the Support sub-page, the SIRIS page also has an issue with the donation link. If users click the 'How do I contribute' link, they are directed to an error page as well. (See Figure 12).

Figure 12: Screen shot of wsiu.org SIRIS webpage

There are also issues regarding the mis-labeling of links. These issues are only relevant on the WSIU KIDS/Raising Readers webpages. From the WSIU Learning drop-down menu, users have the option to select WSIU Kids as an option, while users that click on the WSIU Learning-landing page are given a text link labeled ‘Raising Reader” to access the same WSIU Kids webpage. This could be confusing to some users.

In addition to fixing the site’s broken thinks, I think WSIU should also add global search function to the website. Users can already search within *WSIU InFocus* program segments and within the Radio newsroom, but there is no global search function for the entire site. Along these lines, many of the observational research participants noted that once they started to move within the site’s sub-pages, they lost the ability to tell where the were within the site. Based on input from the participants, I think WSIU might want to develop a sitemap to help users both navigate the site, and understand where webpages are in relation to one another.

Navigation.

Perhaps the most serious problem with wsiu.org is it navigation structure. To begin, the site’s global navigation bar located at the top of the webpage does not extend all the way across the page. Secondly, there are inactive links on the global navigation bar located across the bottom of the homepage.

The site’s most serious problem, however, deals with the options that are available on the global navigation drop-down menu. Based on the results of the

observational research, the data revealed that users will have different experiences with the site depending on how they choose to operate the navigation bar. If a visitor simply clicks on the navigation link instead selecting an option from the site's global navigation's drop-down feature, users will be taken directly to a landing page. If a user goes this route and tries to move throughout the site from the landing page, he or she will not have access to all the content options that are listed in the drop-down navigation. Conversely, there are some text links that are only accessible directly from the landing page rather than from the drop-down navigation. While the use case scenarios tested in the observational research only revealed a handful of these instances, upon further investigation I realize that there are several additional instances of this happening on the website.

For instance, if a user clicks on the WSIU Television landing-page, from that landing-page the user will not have access to information regarding *Scholastic Hi-Q,* History Connector, OnDemand, Feedback, or the Complete Program List. None of these pages can be accessed directly from the television-landing page. Only six of the items listed in the television drop-down navigation can be accessed directly from the television page (See Figure 13).

Figure 13: Screen shot of wsiu.org Television webpage

Similar to issues seen on the television-landing page, the OnDemand webpage also has issues concerning the options that are available on the drop-down navigation. Users are missing out on opportunities to see the What's Coming On PBS webpage, which features streaming video of upcoming programs airing on WSIU TV. Users also have no way to access the PBS Kids Video Player or WSIU on iTunes U from the OnDemand-landing page (See Figure 14).

Figure 14: Screen shot of wsiu.org OnDemand webpage

Similar to the Television and OnDemand webpages, the Radio webpage also has inconsistencies regarding the options that are available from the drop-down navigation. Webpages for Cultural Heritage Month Programming, *Celtic Connections*, WSIU Radio Featured Media, *Radio Voices: The Storytellers*, *In The Author's Voice*, *Sounds Like Radio*, and Local Arts, cannot be accessed directly from the radio-landing page (See Figure 15).

Figure 15: Screen shot of wsiu.org Radio webpage.

Like the other pages, the WSIU Learning-landing page also has issues with navigation. If visitors click the Learning link to go directly to the landing page, they will not have access to the links for the History Connector, the PBS Kids Go Writers Contest or the PBS Kids Video Player webpages (See Figure 16).

Figure 16: Screen shot of wsiu.org Learning webpage.

My biggest concern with this navigation issue is that it could prevent visitors from accessing all the site's information. Viewers who click on the landing-pages will have one experience on the site, while visitors who use the drop-down navigation options will have another. In order to help all visitors have a similar experience, WSIU will need to re-organize the global navigation and/or place text links on each page to make sure the options are available on the landing pages. If WSIU is not open to the idea of completely re-working the global navigation, the other option could be to place links to the missing information in the footer. If the organization goes with this option, they will have to customize each page footer to include links that are available on the drop-down navigation, but not available on the landing page.

Overall, problems with the navigation were an issue for the observational research participants and I believe that this problem could also cause confusion for the site's other users (See Figure 17).

Figure 17: Navigation options based on drop-down menu/landing-pages

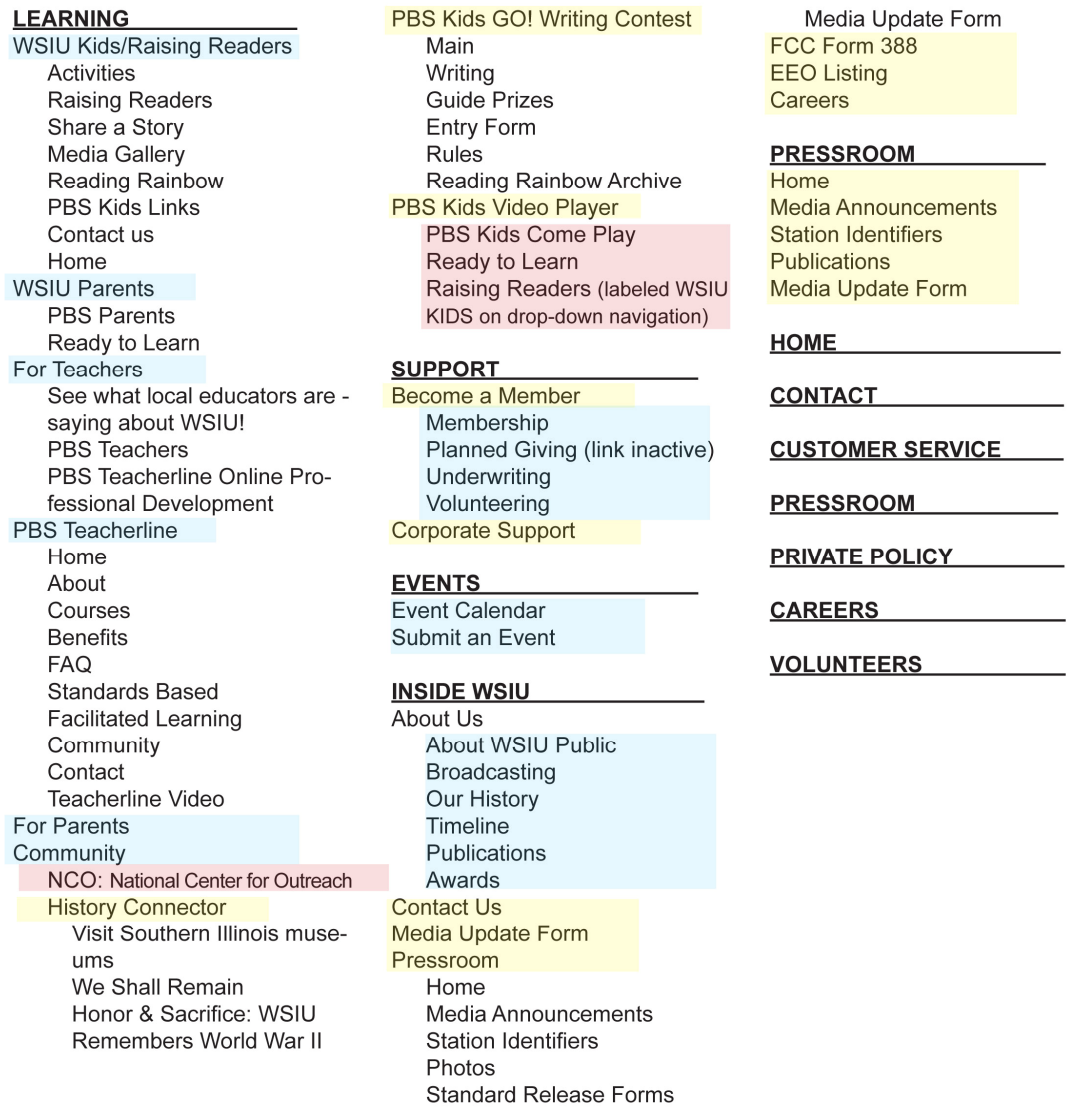


Figure 17: Navigation options based on drop-down menu/landing-pages - continued

Content

While wsiu.org has issues regarding its overall design and site architecture, I also have suggestions for how the organization can adjust content on the site. Some of these suggestions include: creating space for public relations writings, moving content from some the site's sub-pages to the landing

pages, creating more opportunities for underwriter visibility, promoting social media, using multi-media, and promoting locally produced programming.

As mentioned above, a detailed footer might be a good solution for WSIU because it can help solve many of the site's spacing issues. A detailed footer will allow WSIU to reorganize some the unnecessary information in the center or side columns of the page and move it to the bottom. This opens up limited page real estate for targeted promotions. Additionally, a detailed footer could provide a designated area where the organization can place links to information that is missing on each of the site's landing-pages (until they correct the issue with the global navigation). Based on input from the observational research participants, the footer should include links to a sitemap.

Likewise, I would also like to see the site's header re-designed to include links to social media, to donate to WSIU, and to the Powered by You webpage. This will help solve some of the issue regarding giving users access to WSIU's social media and also give visitors the opportunity to donate to WSIU from every page.

Public Relations Writings.

Once WSIU installs a detailed footer, this will open up space on each page for new content. I would like to see the station use this space for public relations pieces and targeted promotions. While WSIU primarily uses its site to promote programs and events, the website can also be used as a positioning tool for issues that are related to the public broadcasting community (ie: education, government funding, local issues, life-long learning, teacher and

educators, southern Illinois history). I would like to see the station use open space for perspective piece or commentary from the Director or from WSIU Friends Board. For instance, the station could publish an opinion piece regarding the *170 Million Americans for Public Broadcasting* initiative and how it affects the station. As a way to integrate the wishes of staff regarding the recycling of promotional content for the web, this space could also be home to the "Word from our Director" articles published in the *Previews* programming guide.

Another way the station could improve the website is by collapsing content from some of the site's sub-pages – moving it to a more visible space like the site's landing pages. I would recommend that WSIU move some of the features located on the OnDemand page or the What's Coming on PBS page to the homepage or to the television-landing page to add interactivity. I would also collapse the content from the WSIU Parents, Raising Readers, and WSIU Learning-landing page. I believe that moving the information up from deep within the site might improve access to these areas. Additionally, if features from this page are placed on the landing-pages, it might help drive traffic to those areas. In some cases, it might even result in the removal of an unnecessary webpage.

Underwriter Visibility.

Another major issue with the site's content regards underwriter visibility, or the lack of underwriter visibility. There were few opportunities for underwriter visibility on the site. I was only able to locate eight instances of underwriter visibility: on the television-landing page (SIU Credit Union), the SIRIS-landing

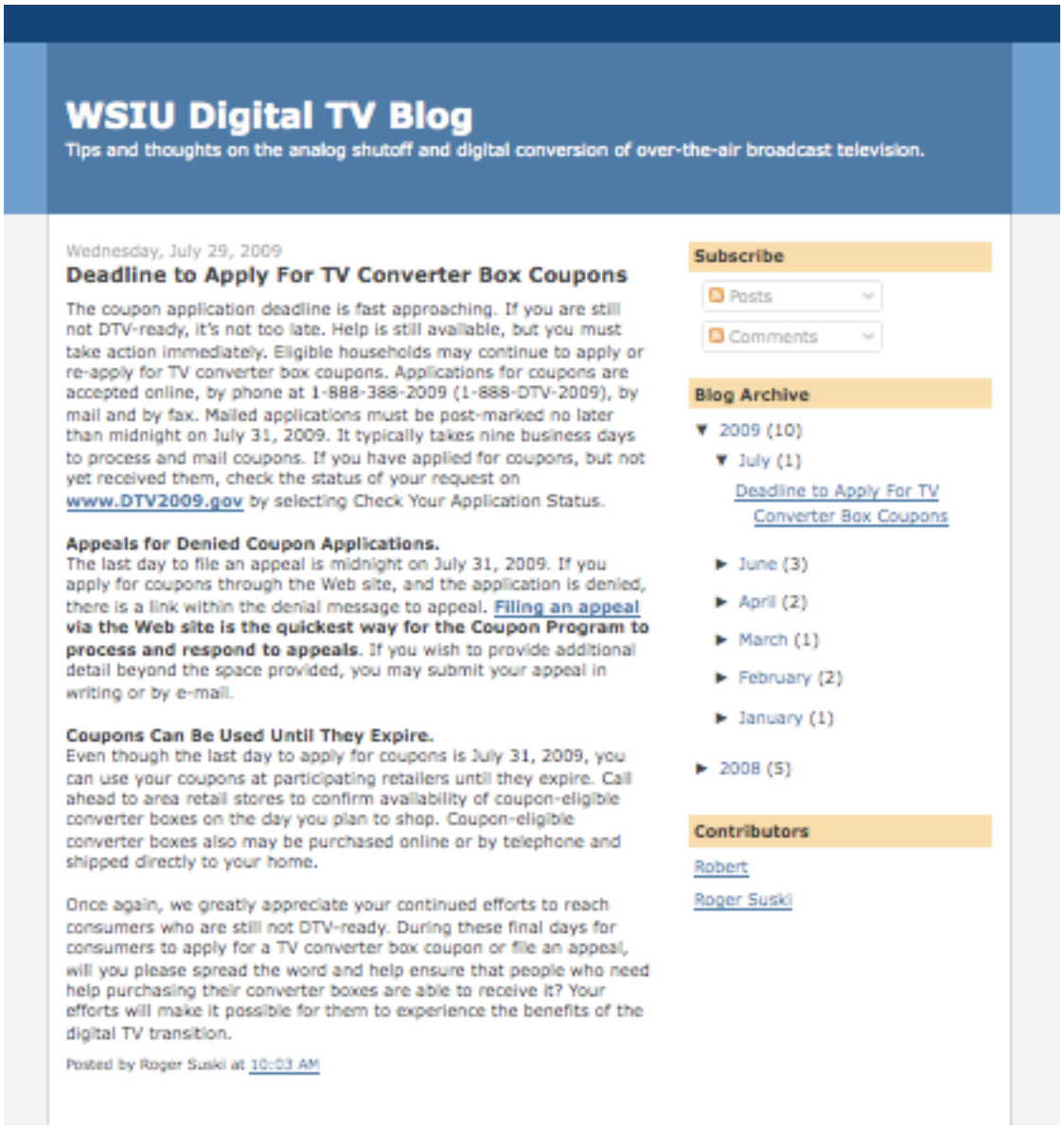
page (United Way), the localized *BizKid$* program page (SIU Credit Union), The *National Parks* sub-page (Walgreens and the SIU Department of Forestry), the History Connector webpage (Walgreens), the *Honor & Sacrifice* webpage (Weber Medical Clinic), the PBS Kids Go Writers Contest webpage (Cedarhurst Center for the Arts and My Favorite Toys), and the Reading Rainbow Contest webpage (Cedarhurst Center for the Arts).

In most cases, an underwriter logo is used and there is also a textual mention of their support. I see this as a missed opportunity for WSIU. If the station can find more ways to give underwriter visibility online, it might result in an in increase corporate support and more funding opportunities. As mentioned above, most cases of underwriter visibility involve placing the businesses logo on the site. Rather than just placing an underwriter logo on the page, I would invite the station to do something more substantial. My recommendation is to tie in the underwriter to a television or radio program through a targeted promotion. For instance, SIU Credit Union is the current underwriter for the *BizKid$* program. WSIU could create a target promotion for the program by having a representative from SIUC Credit Union explain why children should have a basic knowledge of finance. The station could then tie in their commentary with the *BizKid$* program. Ideally, the station could create a permanent space on the website, preferably on the *BizKid$* webpage or the WSIU Kids page, where SIU Credit Union could provide saving tips for kids one week, give information about saving plans for kids another week, provide profiles about kids who own their own business, and discuss the importance of understanding basic finance. By

created targeted promotions, WSIU can offer underwriters visibility with the added value of providing useful information to the community. This also grants the underwriter an opportunity to earn social capital outside of the initial promotion on the website.

Social Media.

I also have recommendations for the site regarding access to social media, or the lack of access to social media. Currently, WSIU has four Facebook pages (WSIU TV, WSIU Radio, Raising Readers, and Sunrise Sports). The station also has a Twitter account as well. Outside of a link to WSIU Radio's Facebook presence on the WSIU Radio-landing page, and excluding the rotating promotion for social media in the slideshows on the Television and Homepage, WSIU does not provide access to their social media accounts. As mentioned above, I recommend placing links to all social media in the website's header in order to make sure there is access to these items on every webpage. Outside of Facebook and Twitter, I would also like to see WSIU better promote their blog. At the moment, WSIU only hosts one original blog for digital television transmission (DTV). The DTV blog is not promoted on the site and is located on the Digital Television webpage, a sub-page of WSIU Television (See Figure 18).



WSIU Digital TV Blog

Tips and thoughts on the analog shutoff and digital conversion of over-the-air broadcast television.

Wednesday, July 29, 2009

Deadline to Apply For TV Converter Box Coupons

The coupon application deadline is fast approaching. If you are still not DTV-ready, it's not too late. Help is still available, but you must take action immediately. Eligible households may continue to apply or re-apply for TV converter box coupons. Applications for coupons are accepted online, by phone at 1-888-388-2009 (1-888-DTV-2009), by mail and by fax. Mailed applications must be post-marked no later than midnight on July 31, 2009. It typically takes nine business days to process and mail coupons. If you have applied for coupons, but not yet received them, check the status of your request on www.DTV2009.gov by selecting Check Your Application Status.

Appeals for Denied Coupon Applications.
The last day to file an appeal is midnight on July 31, 2009. If you apply for coupons through the Web site, and the application is denied, there is a link within the denial message to appeal. **Filing an appeal via the Web site is the quickest way for the Coupon Program to process and respond to appeals.** If you wish to provide additional detail beyond the space provided, you may submit your appeal in writing or by e-mail.

Coupons Can Be Used Until They Expire.
Even though the last day to apply for coupons is July 31, 2009, you can use your coupons at participating retailers until they expire. Call ahead to area retail stores to confirm availability of coupon-eligible converter boxes on the day you plan to shop. Coupon-eligible converter boxes also may be purchased online or by telephone and shipped directly to your home.

Once again, we greatly appreciate your continued efforts to reach consumers who are still not DTV-ready. During these final days for consumers to apply for a TV converter box coupon or file an appeal, will you please spread the word and help ensure that people who need help purchasing their converter boxes are able to receive it? Your efforts will make it possible for them to experience the benefits of the digital TV transition.

Posted by Roger Suski at 10:03 AM

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► April (2)
► March (1)
► February (2)
► January (1)
► 2008 (5)

Contributors
Robert
Roger Suski

Figure 18: Screen shot of wsiu.org DTV blog

I would also recommend that the station give users access to some the PBS Engage blogs. While they do not need to provide links to all of the blogs, they could at least focus on blogs that might compliment their viewer/listener taste preferences. This might be a great solution if the organization does not want to commit to hosting an original blog.

However, my recommendation would be for the station to create another original blog. While blogs may not be popular with the station's primary target market, new media like blogs and social media are very popular with 18-29 year-old college students. The creation of a blog to target this demographic creates an additional opportunity for organization to communicate and connect with students.

Based on my observational research, the participants determined that visitors were having trouble finding information related to student employment and professional development opportunities with the stations. Students play large role at WSIU, making up a good portion of the workforce. Additionally, professional development and student training are part of the station's mission statement and station philosophy. My suggestion would be to create a special place online to communicate with SIUC students who are looking for volunteer and professional development opportunities or campus employment. Rather than creating a webpage, I suggest the station create a Wordpress blog focusing on professional development opportunities at WSIU. In addition to serving as a one-stop-shop for information regarding student employment, the blog can also be used as a recruitment tool for both incoming freshman and enrolled SIUC students looking get real-world training in the media industry. I would recommend that the blog focus on student-produced programs, student worker and assistantship positions, volunteer positions, and information pertaining to campus employment.

Rather than opening-up the blog to any student worker, I recommend the site should function as a single-user blog. The blog can simply focus on former WSIU student employees and feature biographies and testimonials about how working at WSIU as prepared them for the future and helped their careers. In addition to showcasing student talent and achievement, the blog will also serve as a positioning tool to re-enforce WSIU's student professional development mission and brand values. Additionally, the student blog can recycle promotions pertaining to student workers that appear in the *Previews* and *Signal* programming guides.

My last suggestion for the station regarding social media is to get involved with UniversityPlace. UniversityPlace is collaborative project between several university joint-licensee stations: WPSU: Penn State and WPT: Wisconsin, that broadcasts university generated programming via the web.

Multimedia.

I also have issue with the positioning of some multi-media within the website. My first recommendation is to feature some kind of streaming video on the television-landing page. Being that this page centers on the station television productions, it makes sense to have video featured in the sections. Currently, this page is absent of video. I would recommend relocating the video player from the What's Coming on PBS page to the Television-landing page. The ideal scenario would be to use the video player to broadcast a: 30-second promotional spot about *WSIU InFocus* for visitors who are unfamiliar with the program. This

video player could be also used to focus exclusively new episodes of local productions or for *Powered by You* testimonials.

I would also expand some of the text description for programs on the What's Coming on PBS and the OnDemand pages. Expanding the descriptions will provide more information about what is revealed in video.

Also regarding the site's slideshows, I would make sure to provide a text link on each page that allows users to access information the is promoted in the slideshow. Some of the observational research participants reported they did not always see the information that was embedded in the slideshow and would prefer to have a text link to access the information via the landing page. Also regarding the slideshows, I would try to highlight WSIU's children's outreach activities, in addition to the television and radio messages that are currently being promoted via this tool.

Local Program Promotion.

Generally speaking, WSIU has done a great job of aggregating information about most of its services, but there is room for improvement. Currently, the television, radio, and adult outreach areas have visibility on the homepage, but no space is devoted to children's media or the stations outreach for children. Throughout the site, with the exception of the Learning-landing page and sub-pages, there is little information regarding the children's outreach activities and programs.

The station does a good job of promoting its local programs. Local productions have prominence on the homepage, television, and radio pages. WSIU provides companion webpages for all of its local television productions with the exception of *Studio A*. While WSIU Radio does a good job of showcasing its local news features on many of its pages, it has completely ignored *Celtic Connection*. Even though *Celtic Connections* is one of the station's program leaders, it is not even visible on the Radio-landing page. Furthermore, none of WSIU Radio's local productions are accessible directly from the Radio-landing page with the exception of the *Morning Conversations* podcasts.

While most of WSIU's program promotion focuses on either television, radio, or their outreach activities, the stations does not actively provide program highlights by subject or category (ie: health, finance, education, etc.) I see this as a missed opportunity for the station to co-promote. I recommend including an area on the homepage or the OnDemand page to focus on aggregating the main television channel, radio, and digital channel programming. This area should aim to focus on cross-promoting all the station's programming that might fit the within a specific topic.

CHAPTER VI

DISSCUSSION & CONCLUSION

With the emergence of 4G-cell phone technology and the popularity of wireless PDAs, tablets, and other Internet ready devices, the basic webpage has moved beyond serving as a static one-way communication method. The webpage has evolved into a multi-faceted communication platform. Internet technology has created a wealth of new opportunities for businesses to craft promotional messages, promote their product and services, and create a more intimate and informed experience through this essential link.

With the emergence of web 2.0 technologies like podcasting, blogs, video-sharing and increased staying power of social media like Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter, small businesses and non-profit organizations with limited marketing resources have the opportunity to capitalize on a wealth of new promotional possibilities.

We sit at a great moment of opportunity. With the continued development and integration of social media into everyday life and with the expansion of the highly contested open-source philosophy and free software movement, many public broadcasters are positioned to inherit the brain power and technical skills necessary to create and mange their own websites for a fraction of the traditional costs.

WSIU, like many other PBS stations, are beginning to stake their claim on the web and are trying to develop the best method for targeting their publics and promoting their programming and services. While most of this project has focused on WSIU's efforts to promote their programs and services using PBS's and NPR's current suite of CMS software, it is also important to remember that this is only a starting place. As more and public broadcasters become more comfortable and accepting of open-source CMS platforms like Wordpress and Drupal, and as public broadcasters shrinking budgets require them to be more economical concerning their web-based promotion, I believe we will see more broadcasters utilizing these more cost effective, open-source content management system for their webpages.

While many stations rely on Public Interactive, LLC to help them deliver this online experience, some stations like WNET New York and KCTS Washington have decided utilize open-source CMS like the Wordpress Multi-User and Drupal platforms to build dynamic database-driven webpages. While most broadcasters will wait for Public Platform™ to be integrated into the Drupal and Wordpress platforms, there is huge potential for open-source CMS to quickly overtake the industry's use of Public Interactive LLC's proprietary software because of its overall cost effectiveness and usability.

NPR and PBS have recently announced plans to develop a way to integrate the PBS and NPR scheduling modules into commonly used open-source CMS platforms. In article posted on npr.org, Director of Technology for Public Interactive, Doug Gaff, discussed the company's new pilot product Core

Publisher. Core Publisher is built using the Drupal CMS platform and hopeful will serve as a bridge to help stations transition their television and radio programming and news and information modules to a open-source CMS platforms. Unfortunately, stations will still be required to pay for Core Publisher.

As the general public becomes more web-savvy and as open-source CMS becomes more widely known, public broadcasters will need to rationalize to their publics why they continue to spend precious and limited funding dollars on proprietary content management systems instead of using free open-source CMS with the same capabilities.

But perhaps, even more than open-source CMS's cost effectiveness, the philosophy and spirit behind the open-source revolution is perfect match for public broadcasters. Open-source CMS and social media give consumers freedom of choice and freedom to change. Open-source CMS platforms and social media like Facebook and Twitter have created new virtual public spaces. And from what we know about the history and development of public broadcasting in America, if there is a public space, we expect the Public Broadcasting Service to be present in it.

Like PBS has a history of providing consumers with an alternative voice in radio and television programming options, the free software movement and and open-source philosophy have offered consumers an alternative choice in proprietary software and content management options. Just as public broadcasters used the free radio spectrum space set aside by Congress in 1938 and similar to the reservation of television bandwidth that was set aside for

education in 1963, and mirroring the service's adoption of new digital channels within the last two years, public service broadcasters have found a way to disseminate their unique voice into every broadcast platform. Public broadcasters can use the Internet's free public platform and its free services such as open-source CMS and social media platforms to extend their noble message and impact into the 21st century.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Table 2

Coded Research Participant List

Name	Identification
Kraig Kouch	Participant 1
Al Anderson	Participant 2
Olesya Kravchuk	Participant 3
Beth Alongi	Participant 4
Young Kim	Participant 5

APPENDIX B

Figure 19: WSIU Website Re-design – Homepage

Figure 20: WSIU Website Re-design – OnDemand

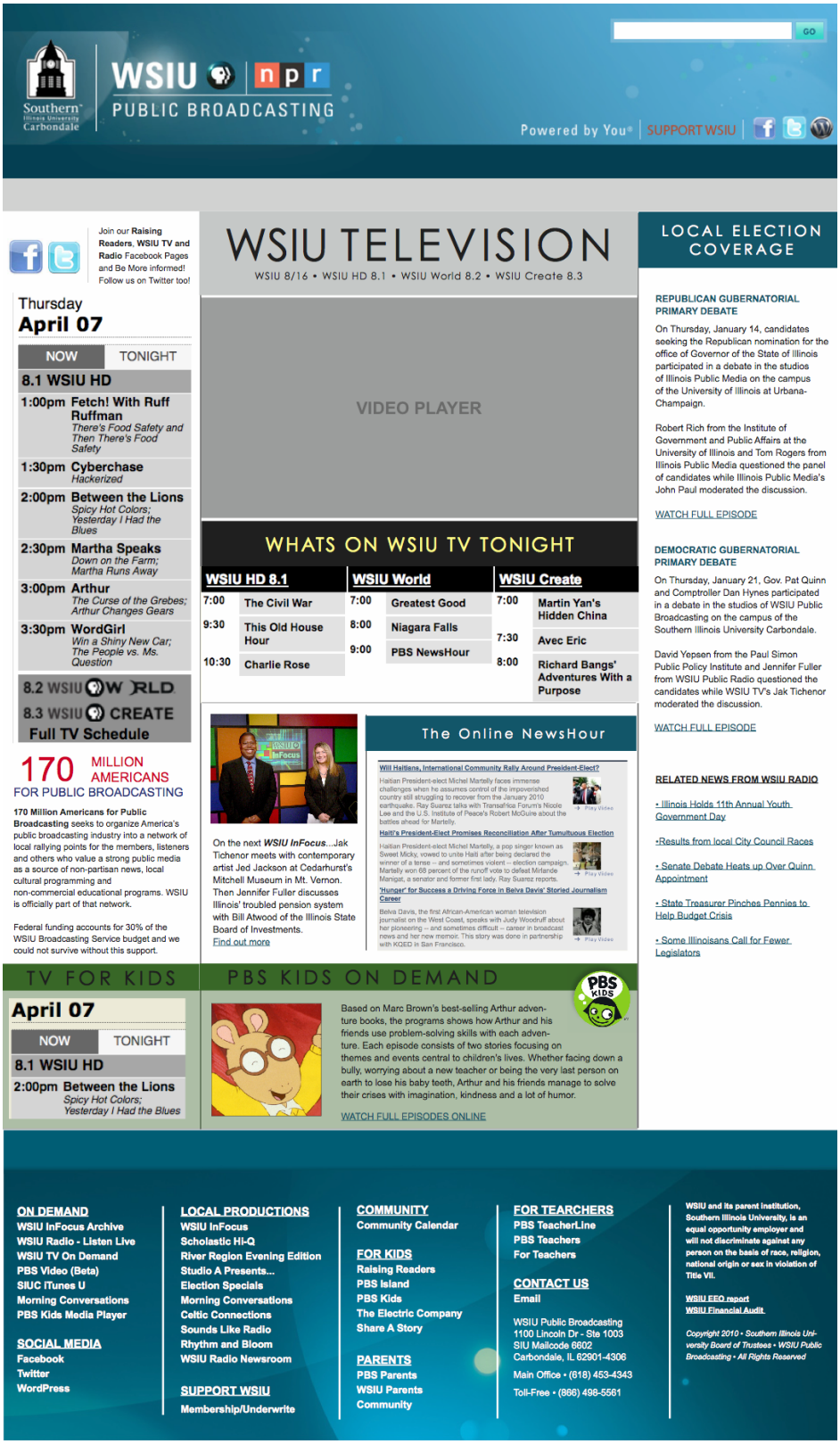

Figure 21: WSIU Website Re-design – Television

Figure 22: WSIU Website Re-design – Radio

Figure 23: WSIU Website Re-design – Learning

Figure 24: WSIU Website Re-design – WSIU Kids

Figure 25: WSIU Website Re-design – Student Professional Development

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