

ONE MISSION, MANY SCREENS

A PBS/MARKLE FOUNDATION STUDY
ON DISTINCTIVE ROLES FOR
CHILDREN'S PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA
IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Synopsis

A strategic plan for PBS Kids must flow from a succinct mission, unique to PBS' children's services while linked to the overall organization's core purpose.

**PBS Kids educates, enriches and entertains all of America's children,
employing the full spectrum of media
to build knowledge and critical thinking;
to empower children as citizens of their communities, nation and world;
and to welcome parents, teachers and caregivers as learning partners.**

Underpinning this statement are six fundamental principles that guide and govern public service media and its provisions for children, each and all vital to fulfilling the mission. They are:

Depth and focus of educational commitment;

Choice of technology platform driven by content and goals;

Financial models that place public trust before return on investment;

Partnerships that support young people as emerging citizens;

Risk-taking subject matter, formats, genres and technology applications; and

Measures of effectiveness uniquely calibrated for every offering.

The Context

American public broadcasting and its counterparts worldwide increasingly operate in a social, economic and technological framework best described as *public service media*. Far more than a non-commercial broadcast or Internet alternative, the term denotes coherent and wide-ranging multi-platform content driven by community or national interests.

Public service media are essential to maintaining democracy, for they regard the audience not as a mass market, but as lifelong learners and engaged citizens seeking thoughtful, involving entertainment. Given a shifting media environment, "One Mission, Many Screens" seeks to provide U.S. public broadcasting with enduring strategies for fulfilling this vision in its service to children.

American youth are growing up with near-ubiquitous media at home, at school and – with increasing wireless services – everywhere in between. According to the Annenberg Public Policy Center's "Media in the Home 2000" report, the average family with children 2-17 had almost three television sets. 97% of those families had VCRs, 78% had basic cable and 31% took premium channels.

70% owned a computer and 52% were connected to the Internet. The Kaiser Family Foundation, in its 1999 "Children and Media at the New Millennium" study, found that 70% of children ages 2-18 lived in homes with at least one video game player, and that older, male, minority and low income children were more likely to own a video game player.

The next frontier is wireless devices, incorporating phones with Internet or other interactive services. A November 2001 study by Upoc/Frank N. Magid and Associates (<http://www.genwireless.com/downloads/mobilestatsummary020802.ppt>) found that just over 50% of US teens (more than 12 million) own a mobile phone, 5.5% own a pager, and 7.3% have a PDA or personal organizer. Europe is well ahead of the US in this field: some estimates put wireless penetration among United Kingdom teens at more than 90%.

In this environment, children are their own program managers and producers, migrating effortlessly among multiple technologies. Many simultaneously use television, computers, games, phones, radios, music, books, magazines, and more.

A range of for-profit businesses deliver content to these devices, including services once unique to public media: educational, sometimes even non-commercial programming; instructional technology and applications; outreach and educator support. That these companies see value in such services is great news for families, but also a powerful challenge to public broadcasters to sharpen their focus, emphasize originality, and state their distinctive attributes more boldly.

Commercial media companies are combining and recombining into global conglomerates. Diversity of outlets may appear to be rising, but is in fact narrowing at the corporate level. By owning means of production *and* distribution, these businesses distribute costs and cross promote, keeping young people's attention on one or another of their own brands. Thus, the need for strong, independent public service media has never been greater.

The Process

“One Mission, Many Screens” reflects the expertise, opinions, practices and principles of people and organizations engaged in public service media and related professions worldwide. The conclusions and recommendations are based on interviews and panel discussions with over 100 professionals, conducted in person and online between July 2001 and April 2002. The work takes into account current research, journalistic coverage of children’s issues and media trends, and both lay and professional writings on youth, media, education and entertainment.

The report’s characterizations and proposals are germane at varying organizational levels. As a result, the terms *public service media*, *public broadcasting*, and *PBS* or *PBS Kids* are used to convey different, complementary and important meanings:

- *PBS* and *PBS Kids* refer specifically to the US Public Broadcasting Service and to the varied services that comprise and accompany its distribution of children’s content.
- *Public broadcasting* refers to the many national, regional, state and local organizations responsible for commissioning, development, distribution and utilization of non-commercial, educational, multi-platform content.
- *Public service media* reflects the evolving complexity and linking of distribution and receiving technologies; the growing possibilities for viewers and users also to be producers and programmers; and the increasingly borderless nature of media. It exists across digital and analog electronic platforms and in print. It takes varying forms and structures worldwide. It may be non-commercial or commercial; education-based or broadly informative; global, regional, national or local. The common bond is a commitment to serving audience needs rather than business imperatives.

Fundamental Principles and Recommendations

Underpinning the Mission Statement are six fundamental principles to guide and govern public service media for children. Each and all are vital to fulfilling the mission. They are not intended to constrict public broadcasting in any way, but to provide a solid foundation for needs analysis and development of new services; evaluation and refinement of existing works; promotion and outreach to children, families, caregivers and educators; and assessment of successes.

Public service media recognize education as the driving force in all decisions.

Public broadcasters' choices of target audience, content, format, medium (or multiple media), partnerships, and even marketing or licensing must be driven by developmentally-sound goals. Commercial media can pick and choose educational themes that are best suited to mass appeal. Public service media need to set and steer a course defined by coherent, comprehensive objectives, devising engaging approaches to "hard" learning.

PBS must gain greater control over its commissioning of children's content than it currently exerts. For every target audience, it must detail and defend specific formal educational objectives and a timeline for fulfilling them, then pursue a focused multi-platform development strategy. This process would be aided by research to determine kids', parents', caregivers' and educators' expectations from educational media. Their views would also aid efforts to communicate more clearly public service media's distinctive aims and benefits.

Children's fluency with media doesn't necessarily mean that they are always thoughtful about media. Critical thinking regarding media content and technology use is among the most-needed skills for 21st Century learners; therefore, public broadcasting should devote special attention to developing lifelong media literacy skills for children and parents.

To be prepared for digital delivery of educational media, PBS must begin now developing strategies for metadata tagging and archiving of its programs and interactive services.

Public service media reach out to young people wherever they are, and are committed to universal access.

Public media must be present on young people's favored media devices and platforms. While universally-available free services are the foremost priority, if public broadcasters wait to claim space until a technology is ubiquitous, all the prime "real estate" will be held by commercial interests. Still, an ecumenical approach to delivery mechanisms is wise, and should be dictated by educational goals and the preferences, access, needs and abilities of the intended audience.

Interactive digital technologies do appear to hold particular promise in certain areas. They may draw older children to sample public service media content, or help create an ‘always on’ image, at least while PBS Kids TV remains a block on a broad-audience channel for most homes.

Technologies are as likely to diverge as to converge. Young people seem to prefer multi-tasking with dedicated devices that do one thing well, over those that do many things just adequately.

Because PBS is not a big enough investor to influence public adoption of new technologies, it should use its trusted brand to leverage early or favored access to distribution. While its first obligation is to universally-available free services, strategic use of emerging platforms or ‘premium’ services may be advisable to secure favorable positioning or to capture young people’s attention in venues they frequent.

Public service media are often non-commercial, but not anti-commerce.

Thoughtful, limited merchandising to parents around public broadcasting’s children’s content can extend learning and enjoyment beyond the screen. Still, a more secure base of financial support is vital to protecting public service media’s essential non-commercial core. US public broadcasting can make a strong, timely argument that expanded federal funding is needed to ensure that the communications infrastructure built by government “digital divide” initiatives will be endowed with high-quality, educational content.

In order for PBS Kids to sustain its “we’re not selling anything but learning” message, it must place educational necessity before merchandising potential in commissioning, development or acquisition of multi-media content. Except for works based on pre-existing, education-based content (e.g., books, software, learning tools), merchandising should never precede the public broadcasting premiere.

PBS should initiate research into parents’ and educators’ practical expectations about its non-commercial stature, to guide financial models and rules for branded merchandise, strategic alliances with for-profit companies, and supplementary ‘premium’ services.

Digital devices that can bypass advertising increase pressure to embed product references in on-air and online content. Public broadcasting must set strong standards against such commercial ‘creep,’ making itself distinctive not only for uninterrupted content, but for uninfluenced content.

The content development and re-branding necessary for PBS Kids to reach older youth will require substantial increase in financial commitment. Ready to Learn funds can underpin young children’s content, but this doesn’t reduce the need for growing National Program Service support. Public broadcasting needs to advocate vigorously for a ‘second generation’ of federal funding based on coherent, innovative strategies for endowing the communications infrastructure (built by government investment) with wide-ranging multi-platform content that will pay long-term dividends in education, civil society and a capable workforce.

Public service media organizations are the hub of a wide-ranging network of partnerships. They use local, national and international alliances to welcome and prepare children as citizens of their communities, nation and world.

The ability to navigate in a diverse “global village” will be a key skill for 21st century citizens. Public broadcasting -- locally owned and operated, but with strong national content and a coherent array of community, national and international partners – is uniquely suited to help children explore and expand their world in developmentally-appropriate ways.

Local presence is public broadcasting’s defining distinction. Licensees will increasingly become digital hubs for extended community information, resource and action network. Doing so depends on long-term strategic partnerships with a limited number of organizations, rather than sequential ad hoc alliances that serve short-term or single-program purposes.

Public broadcasting’s national content must examine, explore and reinforce – not simply reflect – American diversity. Currently, PBS Kids is heavily weighted toward animated fiction. It will be difficult to present themes of cultural diversity with sufficient depth and context without additional live-action and non-fiction content. Achieving genuine diversity of perspectives and voices demands also that PBS Kids engage a broader range of American producers.

Post-September 11 research for PBS by its advertising agency stated it clearly: globalism is now a forced perspective. Yet, almost no US television programming explores or contrasts how young people live elsewhere in the world. Public service media can distinguish itself by creating regular and ongoing on-air and online vehicles for presenting world cultures. A focus on world youth and popular culture, in particular, could be an attractive means for extending the age range of PBS audiences. Digital media offer special opportunities to facilitate exploration by older children across borders and cultures.

Public service media take creative content and programming risks.

Because they are accountable to community needs, not investors or shareholders, public broadcasters have the unique opportunity – if not obligation – to defy common wisdom and test new boundaries of technology and content, in the service of their mission. Risk-taking may entail presentation of ‘challenging’ topics or themes, innovation in format or genre, development of timely or culturally-bound content with limited shelf life or potential for return on investment, or appeal to a narrow but highly engaged audience.

PBS Kids needs greater genre diversity. It is impossible to imagine PBS prime time without live action drama, without news or current affairs, without examination of American, world and popular cultures. Yet, these are major gaps in the PBS Kids lineup.

Even as it offers a ‘safe haven’ for young children, only public service media are likely to take on challenging themes or ideas important to older youth. For parents, teachers and caregivers to have confidence that risk-taking offerings will be thorough, thoughtful and fair, all public broadcasting children’s services must be appropriate, trustworthy and never trivial.

Public service media employ multiple measures of success.

Traditional audience measures – ratings, demographics, web site “hits” – are important to public broadcasters as indicators of effectiveness in reading and responding to the public interest. Public service media apply other measure of success, as well, including social capital indicators, educational benchmarks and signs of deep engagement by the public.

Every offering from PBS Kids deserves specially-tailored goals. Setting these multifaceted measures should be an essential part of the negotiation process for development, acquisition or acceptance of any work, and evaluation using these goals central to renewal or rescheduling.

With its member stations and community/national partners, PBS Kids should develop replicable systems for gathering quantitative and qualitative data toward gauging success. These might include a combination of social capital indicators like participation in community partnerships or membership growth; educational benchmarks including adoption of materials by schools and caregivers; business measures like returns from related merchandise or continuation of projects beyond the R&D phase; or signs of deep engagement such as time spent online or audience submissions.

Independent peer review would bring fresh eyes to assessing consistency and quality. PBS Kids should consider a children’s media advisory committee of producers, advocates, researchers, journalists, artists, authors, teachers and others.

FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Public service media recognize education as the driving force in all decisions.

For PBS Kids, this means:

Choices of target audience, content, format, medium (or multiple media), partnerships, and marketing are driven by developmentally-sound curriculum and goals. The design and production process is informed by the participation of children, parents, researchers, educators, caregivers and subject matter experts.

1. PBS must gain greater control over its commissioning of children's content. For every target audience, it must detail and defend specific formal educational objectives and a timeline for fulfilling them, then pursue a focused multi-platform development strategy.
2. Public broadcasting should initiate research to determine kids', parents', caregivers' and educators' expectations from multi-platform educational media. This information can inform both development of services and communication of public service media's distinctive aims and benefits.
3. To be prepared for the future of educational media -- digital delivery in a distributed-media environment -- PBS must begin now developing strategies for metadata tagging and archiving of its programs and interactive services.
4. Public broadcasting should devote special attention to developing lifelong media literacy skills for children and parents.

FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Public service media reach out to young people wherever they are, and are committed to universal access.

For PBS Kids, this means:

An ecumenical approach to delivery mechanisms is wise, including and combining, as appropriate, television (analog and digital), Internet, video-cassette, radio, packaged digital media (i.e., DVD, CD-ROM, computer software, console games), wireless communication devices, and print.

While making every effort to avoid choices that widen the ‘digital divide,’ universal access need not mean that everyone has free access to everything, always.

1. PBS Kids must be present, and its brand visible, via young people’s favored media devices; however, the first consideration in all project development must be the educational goal or developmental need, not the distribution technology or device.

That said, there are two particular areas in which interactive digital technologies do appear to hold particular promise. These are:

- Drawing older children – 9-11-year-olds – to sample public service media, with the anticipation of using their input and interest to develop new content; and
 - Creating an ‘always on’ image, at least for such time as PBS Kids television remains a block on a broad-audience channel for most homes, competing for attention against full-time children’s services.
2. Public service media should assume that technologies will diverge as much as they will converge. While young people’s multi-tasking behaviors are likely to accelerate, there are indications that they prefer parallel use of dedicated technologies over a single do-everything device.
 3. Because PBS is not a big enough investor to influence public adoption of new technologies, it should instead use its trusted brand to leverage early or favored access to distribution. In this regard, it can serve both as a leading content provider to children and as a reliable navigation/selection guide for adults, pointing to high-quality content whatever the source.

PBS Kids’ first obligation is to its universally available free services. Strategic use of narrowly-available distribution, or ‘premium’ services, however, may be advisable in order to secure favorable positioning with emerging technologies or to capture young people’s attention in venues they frequent.

FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Public service media are often non-commercial, but not anti-commerce.

For PBS Kids, this means:

Experience dictates that some value-added marketing and merchandising is not only acceptable but desirable, as a means for extending enjoyment and learning beyond the screen. By ascertaining parents' and educators' understanding of 'non-commercial,' PBS Kids sets clear limits that distinguish its public service nature from its commercial counterparts.

1. PBS should initiate research into parents' and educators' practical expectations about its non-commercial stature. Crucial areas to probe are differences in attitudes regarding home-use and school-use content, and parents' ability to discern between local (often more permissive) and national underwriting messages.

This research will guide financial models and rules for services such as branded merchandise, strategic alliances with for-profit companies, and supplementary 'premium' services.

2. Marketing value lies principally with public broadcasting's content and character sub-brands. This allows PBS Kids to maintain some distance from merchandising and sustain its "we're not selling anything but learning" message. To uphold this point, however, PBS Kids must place educational necessity before merchandising potential in commissioning, development or acquisition of multi-media content. Except for works based on pre-existing, education-based content (e.g., books, software, learning tools), merchandising should never precede the public broadcasting premiere.
3. Public broadcasting must codify strong standards against commercial 'creep' into content, regardless of platform. Digital recorders are likely to enable viewers to bypass stand-alone commercials, making all TV programming non-commercial in practice. The resulting search for a viable economic model will almost certainly increase commercial references embedded in content, on air and online. Public broadcasting must then be distinctive not only for uninterrupted content, but for uninfluenced content.
4. Content development and re-branding necessary for PBS Kids to become engaging and authentic to the next oldest age groups (especially 9-11) will demand substantial increase in financial commitment. Ready to Learn funds can underpin young children's content, but this doesn't reduce the need for growing National Program Service support, pegged to children's services' proportion of hours in the NPS schedule.

5. Public broadcasting needs to advocate vigorously for a coherent ‘second generation’ of federal funding. As government support wanes for narrowing the digital divide through infrastructure, the argument should be based on innovative strategies and partnerships for endowing the now-established communications network with wide-ranging, educational, multi-platform content.

FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**Public service media organizations are the hub
of a wide-ranging network of partnerships.
They use local, national and international alliances
to welcome and prepare children
as citizens of their communities, nation and world.**

For PBS Kids, this means:

Public service media can provide a blend of information, ideas and connections that enable children to explore and expand their world at developmentally-appropriate times and pace.

Unlike any other US broadcast, cable, satellite or online service, public broadcasting is locally owned and operated, but with strong national content and international associations.

It is uniquely suited to position itself at the center of a grid of ongoing partnerships beyond the screen – with educational, cultural, civic and religious institutions; parents’ and professional groups; governments and non-governmental organizations; youth groups and clubs; hardware and software companies; even with other media outlets.

Recommendations are presented in three ‘circles’:

- Local presence, public broadcasting’s defining distinction;
- National content that probes – not simply reflects – American diversity;
- Global windows for a generation with few borders.

Local presence, public broadcasting’s defining distinction

1. Instead of sequential *ad hoc* alliances that serve short-term or single-program purposes, PBS should secure long-term strategic partnerships with a limited number of organizations that are national in scope but present in local communities. Licensees can supplement the national collaborations with specific local alliances, thereby positioning public broadcasters as the digital hub of a coherent, extended community ‘web’ of action, information and resources.

Every partnership must:

- Measurably advance one or more of public service media’s education goals;
- Effectively leverage public service media’s core resource – multi-platform educational content designed expressly for children and their caregivers;
- Provide access to new technological, promotional and/or financial resources;
- Use existing structures – especially locally – rather than building new bureaucracies;

- Be sustainable over time; and
 - Include a mechanism for listening to the target audience, in order to review and refine the partnership at the national and local level.
2. Turnkey projects – like the *Zoom* local/national initiative – that enable licensees to give a community *look and feel* to national content across platforms, will remain a unique possibility for public broadcasting, and are potentially a powerful draw for young people.

National content that probes – not simply reflects – American diversity

1. Public service media must examine, explore and reinforce cultural diversity. A cast of varied characters who interact and empathize is necessary, but not sufficient.
 - Currently, PBS Kids is heavily weighted toward animated fiction. It will be difficult to present themes of cultural diversity with sufficient depth and context that children can relate them to their own lives, without additional live-action and non-fiction content.
 - Achieving genuine diversity of perspectives and voices demands that PBS Kids seek opportunities to engage a broader range of American producers.

A global window for a generation with few borders

1. Post-September 11 research for PBS by its advertising agency stated it clearly: *Globalism is now a forced perspective*. Yet, almost no US television programming explores or contrasts how young people live elsewhere in the world. Public service media can distinguish itself by creating regular and ongoing on-air and online vehicles for presenting world cultures. A focus on world youth and popular culture, in particular, could be an attractive means for extending the age range of PBS audiences.
2. PBS should develop a context for occasional features from, or links to, other countries' outstanding or innovative children's media. Beyond its entertainment value, this can be packaged as a media literacy exercise, as media choices provide remarkable insight into a nation's view of children's growth, learning and fun.

As one aspect, PBS should revitalize its participation with the European Broadcasting Union, and take part in its international program exchanges. This is an inexpensive means for acquiring content that provides a window into other world cultures.

3. Digital media offer opportunities to facilitate exploration by older children across borders and cultures. Many elements of video gaming don't rely on language. With thoughtful content in keeping with its mission – perhaps in partnership with other public service media outlets – PBS Kids could become a testbed for new methods of culture exchange.

FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Public service media take creative, content and programming risks.

For PBS Kids, this means:

Public broadcasting is accountable to the public, and not to shareholders or investors. This affords it the unique opportunity – some would say obligation – to defy common wisdom and experiment with the boundaries of technology and content, so long as the goal is better to fulfill its mission.

Risk-taking may entail presentation of ‘challenging’ topics or themes, innovation in format or genre, development of timely or culturally-bound content with limited shelf life or return on investment, and appeal to a narrow but highly engaged audience.

1. PBS Kids needs greater genre diversity. It is impossible to imagine the National Program Service for adults without live action drama, without news or current affairs, without examination of American, world and popular cultures. Yet, these are major gaps in the PBS Kids lineup.
2. For the youngest children, public service media should be a ‘safe haven.’ This is generally interpreted to mean a place where parents can leave their children unattended, in the knowledge that they’ll see beneficial offerings without exposure to inappropriate violence, sex, coarse content or language, and commercialism.

For elementary and older youth, however, only public service media – responsible to citizens rather than shareholders – is likely to take on challenging themes or ideas.

Doing so demands viewers’ and families’ trust. Public service media must ensure that parents, teachers and caregivers respect it as being thorough, thoughtful and fair. They must have confidence that public broadcasting’s service to children is appropriate and trustworthy, but not trivial.

FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Public service media employ multiple measures of success.

For PBS Kids, this means:

Whereas commercial media are ultimately held accountable to a bottom line of ratings and/or ancillary merchandise revenues, public service media has the luxury of multiple indicators of success, both quantitative and qualitative. It can view each offering as a multi-platform portfolio, with different expectations and purposes for every element. Further, it has the opportunity to assess its effectiveness with multiple audiences: children, parents, teachers and caregivers, system professionals and even others in children's media.

Even traditional commercial measures – user/audience size, composition, frequency and duration – have unique significance. These are quantitative emblems of public broadcasting's effectiveness in reading and responding to the public interest.

1. Every offering from PBS Kids deserves specially-tailored goals. Setting these multifaceted measures should be an essential part of the negotiation process for development, acquisition or acceptance of any work, and evaluation using these goals central to renewal or rescheduling.
2. Working with member stations and community/national partners, PBS Kids should develop replicable systems for gathering quantitative and qualitative measures of success. These might include a combination of social capital indicators like participation in community partnerships or membership growth; educational benchmarks including adoption of materials by schools and caregivers; business measures like returns from related merchandise or continuation of projects beyond the R&D phase; or signs of deep engagement such as time spent online or audience submissions.
3. Content quality is determined in part by impact on the target audience, but in part by subjective standards like creativity or innovation, effective and aesthetic use of production resources, and clarity. Independent peer review of consistency and quality would bring fresh eyes to these assessments; PBS Kids should consider a children's media advisory committee, involving producers from varied platforms (without current content on PBS), advocates, researchers, journalists, artists, authors, teachers and others.

AMPLIFICATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS: SECTION 1:

Public service media recognize education as the driving force in all decisions.

For PBS Kids, this means:

Choices of target audience, content, format, medium (or multiple media), partnerships, and marketing are driven by developmentally-sound curriculum and goals. The design and production process is informed by the participation of children, parents, researchers, educators, caregivers and subject matter experts.

Recommendations:

1. PBS must gain greater control over its children's content commissioning. For every target audience, it must detail and defend formal educational objectives and a timeline for fulfilling them, then pursue a focused multi-platform development strategy.
2. PBS should initiate research to determine kids', parents', caregivers' and educators' expectations from multi-platform educational media. This information can inform both development of services and communication of public service media's distinctive aims and benefits.
3. To be prepared for the future of educational media -- digital delivery in a distributed-media environment -- PBS must begin now developing strategies for metadata tagging and archiving of its programs and interactive services.
4. PBS should devote special attention to developing lifelong media literacy skills for children and parents.

Analysis

As a widening range of commercial media outlets offer educational content, public service media's distinction in this area will derive from three factors:

- Public service media – educational by mission – must offer a coherent, comprehensive curriculum, and challenge itself to devise approaches to “hard” learning. Commercial media – educational by choice – can ‘cherry-pick’ themes best suited to mass appeal.
- Public service media authenticates its added value through ongoing research into its overall service and individual components, using the results to inform and empower parents and educators.

- Public service media fosters effective integration of its offerings into schools and child care settings, through ongoing local and national partnerships, and services that continue the learning process after the child leaves the screen.

Amplification of Recommendations

PBS must gain greater control over its children’s content commissioning. For every target audience, it must detail and defend formal educational objectives and a timeline for fulfilling them, then pursue a focused multi-platform development strategy.

Throughout the interviews and panels for this research, two opinions emerged repeatedly: PBS is over-weighted toward pre-school content, and PBS too often accepts programs that are relatively easy to finance, but fail to advance its mission.

The first point is measurable, and borne out by PBS’s dominance of Nielsen’s 2-5 audience ratings, but relative disappearance from 6-11-year-olds’ viewership.

The latter point is more perceptual, but is supported by a Fall 2001 chart detailing the thematic distribution of PBS Kids’ daily programming. Over half (58%) of its series were classified as *Social/Emotional*, the same “soft” curriculum claimed by nearly all the commercial broadcast series made to meet the FCC’s educational programming mandate.

Moreover, both of the above points were articulated by diverse stakeholders, as threats to PBS’ stature as America’s premier educational media source.

A long-time children’s media advocate said, “PBS is making a terrible mistake, putting on many too many shows for pre-schoolers that are very much alike, and not terribly educational...To say [these programs fit the] public television mission simply because they’re based on books...the hell with that.”

A toy company’s senior marketing executive stated, “PBS has relinquished its responsibility by not serving the 6-12 audience.”

The head of a children’s media production company suggested, “programming decisions are being driven by the economic deal – the merchandising potential. That’s wrong from a public policy standpoint, but also discourages innovation.”

Even a PBS executive noted, “in regard to whether or not PBS should “push the envelope” and go after school kids and/or a teen audience -- this is not simply a “comfort zone.” If PBS considers its current placement as “status quo,” that’s frightening.”

PBS needs a forward-looking system for analyzing needs, based on national learning goals, current holdings, and gaps in both public service media and others' offerings and pipelines. As one panelist – a child development and media expert – put it, PBS needs *a review process of new programming that not only evaluates the educational merit of individual programs/series, but also evaluates how each new project fits into the day's broadcast schedule so that the service as a whole offers children a full range of styles and content.*

Other public service telecasters in our interviews cited this level of control over commissioning as vital to fulfilling their missions. On this specific point, England's Channel Four may be PBS's closest analogue, since both are publisher broadcasters, not producing broadcasters. Every year, 4Learning – the channel's youth and education arm – issues an RFP detailing curriculum areas in which it has special interest. From the 500 proposals received on average, Channel 4 can commission about 25 series.

Setting priorities needn't handcuff PBS creatively, or prevent it from accepting outstanding or innovative ideas that arrive unsolicited (4 Learning is always open to proposals beyond the list). Instead, it provides a structure by which PBS can communicate needs to the producing community, a first measure for evaluating proposals, and an assurance that each new addition fulfills a unique purpose.

In their panel discussion toward this research, PBS' current series producers asked for this kind of clear communication of National Program Service needs and interests. One participant, who has been both a broadcaster and a producer, found substantial agreement from others when he commented that *the broadcaster sees gaps in the audience and seeks to fill them; the producer asks the broadcaster 'what do you need' and tries to respond.*

A well defined, publicly-stated set of priorities by which the National Program Service and Ready to Learn weigh proposals should also help satisfy producers' call for better responsiveness from PBS: quicker turnaround, better information on where proposals stand, and greater clarity about PBS contacts for specific needs.

Instituting a pro-active commissioning process will support a number of other recommendations herein, regarding risk-taking, embracing digital media, partnerships, cultural content, and more.

PBS should initiate research to determine kids', parents', caregivers' and educators' expectations from multi-platform educational media. This information can inform both its development of services and its communication of public service media's distinctive aims and benefits.

A strong research underpinning is a distinguishing feature of public service media's approach to education, as compared with its commercial competitors. There is consensus that PBS – especially through its Ready to Learn service – is effective in disseminating developmentally-appropriate, program-specific support materials that extend learning beyond the screen.

There is also consensus, however, that US public broadcasting must better communicate the research evidence for the overall potential of media in education and child development, using it to articulate the case for its own services, in concrete terms for parents, caregivers and educators.

As one senior public broadcasting executive put it, *we need to do more to inform parents and caregivers about the research basis of public service media children's services. Even the first part of the conversation – the impact of the media on development – is not sufficiently done yet. There's even more need for the second part – how we know what we know and what makes public broadcasting different or better.*

Two panelists cited separate research findings, each holding that parents have very low expectations for the educational value of television.

This isn't surprising. It's easier to publicize emotional and immediate research on media 'zeitgeist' than to translate subtleties of longitudinal studies of learning benefits. As a result, academic analyses of educational potential go unnoticed relative to works detailing concerns regarding on-air or online sex, violence, cultural values, safety and privacy. Often, these studies are conducted by groups whose policy interests are served by finding shortfalls in popular media.

Equally, the sheer volume of entertainment media in their children's lives must overwhelm parents. Familiar media brands – Disney, Nickelodeon, Cartoon Network, Nintendo, Playstation, *Spongebob*, *Pokemon*, *Powerpuff*, *Super Mario* – are ubiquitous, not just on screens but on clothes, accessories and in the grocery store.

This imbalance can be combated through clear, consistent and continual communication on the unique benefits of public service media. Doing so, however, requires better knowledge about parents', educators' and caregivers' beliefs, hopes, pre-conceptions and expectations for the various media in children's lives.

The Markle Foundation's May 2000 *Growing Up With Interactive Media* report advocates for a National Media Lab – an independent consortium to conduct, evaluate, synthesize and promote studies on media and child development. Such a center could serve multiple audiences: producers could test for best practices; educators could develop effective media utilization strategies; parents could find guidance for choosing the best content for their children.

Public service media should support this effort. In lieu of direct financial support, it might pledge access to the creative development process for works it commissions, as a real-world laboratory. Further, public broadcasting might broker the kind of local and national partnerships that are among its distinguishing features, to facilitate nationwide research and testing for the National Media Lab and to disseminate and apply subsequent findings.

This approach would be consistent with the birthright of public broadcasting's service to children. Ed Palmer, in his 1988 book "Television and America's Children: A Crisis of Neglect," wrote about the founding principles of the Children's Television Workshop: *The Workshop was determined not to be just a production factory churning out TV programs, but a research laboratory dedicated to devising and validating methods of teaching children more effectively.*

Nothing less is demanded of public service media overall, in the digital age.

To be prepared for the future of educational media -- digital delivery in a distributed-media environment -- PBS must begin now developing strategies for metadata tagging and archiving of its programs and interactive services.

Practical solutions that demonstrate insight into educators' basic needs will go a long way toward ensuring adoption of public service media content. Entering a digital environment, those needs remain consistent, but opportunities for fulfilling them may be greatly enhanced. Our interviews with educational technology specialists revealed those basic needs, whatever the platform, to be:

- Relevance to curriculum requirements;
- Engaging use of media, interactive for the learner as appropriate;
- Availability on demand, and quick to download or access;
- Indexing for easy location and selection – by keyword, topic, title, suggested grade level and both state and national standards;
- Integration of content with standards and assessment mechanisms.

By many measures, linear television alone is inefficient for delivering educational content:

- It assumes all viewers to be at the same level of interest and accomplishment;
- It isn't dynamic – the content can't easily be changed once it's committed to tape or disk;
- Added depth means added length, and program lengths tend to be both fixed and limited.

Digital, distributed media is much better adapted to educators' needs:

- Content can be customized for the interests or learning level of an individual or group;
- The basic elements can be adapted to varied approaches and learning styles;
- Depth is achieved by recombination of content, so a work can be made deeper without necessarily increasing its length.
- Specific content can be delivered on demand
- Materials can be updated readily.

As a financial consideration, television does have the advantage that distribution cost remains the same regardless of the number of users.

A gradual transition is already underway from a broadcast model to a distributed media model, enabled by digital video recording technology that simplifies finding, storing and using content from a wide variety of sources.

At the moment, these devices (e.g., Tivo) are being used primarily in homes; however, next generation devices (e.g., Pearson Broadband's proprietary "Knowledge Box" or the commercially-available Nokia Media Terminal) are being aimed at schools, which have higher penetration of broadband access than homes.

Very quickly, strategies will evolve to bridge home and school use, via personal video recorders and online communication between parents and educators. This is a potentially lucrative market, as parents have proved willing to invest money in educational enrichments for their children.

In a panel discussion at Pearson Broadband – an emerging commercial leader in delivering educational media and, therefore, a key competitor to public service media worldwide – the company President discussed its most valuable resources. Most people assume that Pearson Publishing’s library of content is the broadband division’s top asset, but this has proved hard to exploit, thus far. Instead, the company’s access to, and respected position with, content creators has proved more important, matched by the company’s willingness to invest risk capital.

At least at present, public broadcasting can’t compete with Pearson in spending. It can and must make the most of its trusted name, ability to partner with a variety of organizations, and non-commercial public interest mission to compete vigorously for the business of content creators and adoption by educators.

PBS may find its way more clear in exploiting its archive of multi-platform content. Its entire library was ‘born’ with an educational audio-visual mission, so public broadcasting can and must think beyond its children’s and instructional collections in offering services to educators. The full spectrum of public broadcasting offerings – *Nova*, *Nature*, *Frontline*, mini-series and specials, etc. – has enormous potential, in whole and for its audio, video, online and behind the scenes components.

US public broadcasting is not alone in needing to forge a strategy for building and managing digital archives of existing and emerging content. The European Broadcasting Union Digital Strategy Group – in its December 2001 report *Media With a Progressive Purpose, Part II: Managing Digital Evolution* – wrote of the vital nature of developing systems to organize ‘metadata’, or data that accompanies and describes the overt content, and can be used for search and retrieval toward production or delivery:

Metadata will be an important constituent of archive systems, and it will be the fundamental element of the whole production ‘media asset management’ system.

The EBU report later tackled the practical issue of managing a massive archive that may reach back decades:

When public service broadcasters begin digital archives they are faced with an enormous amount of content. One practical approach may be to begin by creating archives for material which will otherwise perish, then turn to archiving current material as it is made. Other content could be digitally archived when needed as part of a current programme.

PBS might consider joining with the EBU’s Digital Strategy Group in its ongoing development of archive policies and practices. With a shared heritage and mission, there may be potential for US and European public broadcasters to achieve economies of scale through collaboration. More than just savings, however, given the increasingly global nature of both digital media and educational standards, there may emerge international ventures with favorable business models. Pearson Broadband leaders, for example, noted that niche educational markets that might not be profitable locally or nationally become viable on a global scale, through digital delivery of multi-purpose, segmented content.

The work of Professor Brian Smith at MIT's Media Lab may have revealing possibilities for coordinating delivery of educational content to home and schools. Smith's field – called “explanation architecture” – involves the analysis and annotation of educational media, and the technological distribution of that information.

Two aspects of Smith's annotations are of particular interest. First, they are designed not only to describe content, but also to give the producer a structure for authenticating and extending educational underpinnings. Second, the annotations are designed to work as “foreground” as well as background.

For example, Smith has developed an e-mail delivery system that can be used to inform parents or educators about programming children have watched, including overall goals and specific content both seen and missed (if the child left the program mid-way). The message can suggest follow-up questions and resources.

Research indicates that co-viewing and discussion of television content improves effectiveness of educational messages. Yet, it's impractical to believe that parents or caregivers can always watch along. Smith's digitally-delivered annotations engage adults and suggest substantive follow-up.

This kind of documentation can also foster media literacy, by peeling away the surface presentation of educational content and revealing the foundations. The accompanying content needn't be limited to educational explanation, either. In an interactive environment, games or other activities could be linked with the surface material.

Finally, as a business consideration, Smith's model invites parents and educators to be active and positive partners in the child's media use. Public service media could offer this customized content as a value-added service or premium of membership.

PBS should devote special attention to developing lifelong media literacy skills for children and parents.

Asked to define 21st Century learners' most-needed skills, critical thinking regarding media and technology rose to the top for educators, child and family specialists, and technology developers. They cited three components: the ability to find and select appropriate content across technologies, the ability to discern veracity or authenticity of information (as both a learner and a consumer), and the ability to create original materials by manipulating media.

The Executive Director of a center devoted to education and technology, for example, described successful 21st Century learners as *kids who are better thinkers, more creative in approaching problems, know where to find information and evaluate it, are able to synthesize it into active knowledge and express their understandings using technology and multimedia, and who can use multimedia to express their multiple intelligences.*

The President of a national education group echoed this view, saying: *It will be important for students to apply these skills to technology, to use it as a tool to enhance their abilities to access and communicate information. Because of the ever-changing landscape of information, students as never before must be able to receive, process and build on that information in rapid fashion.*

The first generation to grow up with pervasive digital media is reaching adulthood. Undoubtedly, when both parents and their children are “digital natives,” this will narrow the existing generation gap regarding comfort with technology.

Still, there’s no reason to expect that the pace of change in devices will slow. Moreover, young people will always invent unanticipated uses for digital technologies. As one panelist noted, *kids will find a way to accentuate their differences from their parents.*

It’s important that parents realize that children’s fluency with media doesn’t necessarily mean that they are always thoughtful about media; therefore, there will always be a need and niche for supporting parents’ technology literacy.

Public broadcasters are especially well positioned to promote media education, with near-ubiquitous reach through television, outreach into schools and communities, and commitment to free and equitable dissemination. By mission, as well, they are suited to building media awareness and critical ability among parents who need it most:

- Home computer and Internet access still correlate closely with income (per the Department of Commerce “Falling Through the Net” studies), but 98% of U.S. schools have computers (<http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2001/2001071.pdf>), so parents in low SES neighborhoods are more likely to find themselves less computer literate than their children.
- Television options may be less diverse in low-income areas. Per the Cable TV Ad Bureau (<http://www.cabletvadbureau.com>), the income gap between cabled and non-cabled homes has widened every year since the late 1980’s.
- Public media’s pre-school educational resources, reinforced by Ready to Learn extensions, can be of greatest benefit in neighborhoods with the fewest child care options.

As one panelist, head of a youth research company, noted: *The divide is clearly not simply about access to the Internet...The critical issues will include orientation to information (how one uses it), comfort with communication, and comfort with the integration of technology into their lives in general.*

Media literacy is a theme that PBS’ commercial counterparts are unlikely to take on, because it fosters a wary eye toward the underlying messages of the medium, making it difficult to sell to commercial sponsors.

The public service approach to media literacy should be positive. **Sesame Street, Between the Lions, Reading Rainbow** – all build enthusiasm and engagement with reading as the foundation for life-long literacy. Media literacy, equally, must acknowledge that today’s children are steeped in screen-based content. Enhancing their ability to “read” its unique vocabulary and structure is an enhancement, not an inoculation. Critical media users will, themselves, develop appropriate sensitivity to excesses in violence, commercialism, stereotyping, and other areas.

The opportunity to create is an important component of media literacy, as well. PBS might engage young people in a game-like online activity that will foster critical thinking about their media options, while eliciting their views about PBS and its competitors and illuminating their media habits and preferences. This would involve an online “operations center” with tools that invite older children to build TV schedules or digital media content collections with various aims in mind.

Visitors would have the opportunity to build television schedules or other media collections by selecting from the full range of popular media options (not just public broadcasting). The site could be changed and updated to encourage return visits, with different objectives:

Choose five programs and put them in the best order for a schedule that’s meant for kids your age to relax with? ...a schedule to learn how to be a better friend? ...a schedule to show someone who’s just arrived about living in America?

What three web sites would you visit first to find information about growing up in Kenya? ...to find fun games for your 7-year-old brother or sister?

In cooperation with schools, or as home broadband access increases, the site could be extended to enable young people to manipulate and assemble digital media resources:

As promotion director, your job is to create short “spots” to make people your age want to watch this new TV series. Choose and assemble a :30 message from the clips provided.

To extend learning and build community on the site, young people should be able to view other children’s individual schedules/web-links/videos, and also to access aggregate figures on their peers’ choices.

Building media literacy should be a core element of all public service media’s communication, not an add-on or discrete outreach project. (PBS Online’s current, very natural integration of “smart surfing” tips is a good example.) In this way, promoting early reflection by young people about the nature of quality in the media they consume will help them continue to choose public broadcasting, as they grow older.

AMPLIFICATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS: SECTION 2:

Public service media reach out to young people wherever they are, and are committed to universal access.

For PBS Kids, this means:

An ecumenical approach to delivery mechanisms is wise, including and combining, as appropriate, television (analog and digital), Internet, video-cassette, radio, packaged digital media (i.e., DVD, CD-ROM, computer software, console games), wireless communication devices, and print.

While making every effort to avoid choices that widen the ‘digital divide,’ universal access need not mean that everyone has free access to everything, always.

Recommendations

1. PBS Kids must be present, and its brand visible, via young people’s favored media devices; however, the first consideration in all project development must be the educational goal or developmental need, not the distribution technology or device.

That said, there are two particular areas in which interactive digital technologies do appear to hold particular promise. These are:

2. Drawing older children – 9-11-year-olds – to sample public service media, with the anticipation of using their input and interest to develop new content; and
3. Creating an ‘always on’ image, at least for such time as PBS Kids television remains a block on a broad-audience channel for most homes, competing for attention against full-time children’s services.
4. Public service media should assume that technologies will diverge as much as they will converge. While young people’s multi-tasking behaviors are likely to accelerate, there are indications that they prefer parallel use of dedicated technologies over a single do-everything device.
5. Because PBS is not a big enough investor to influence public adoption of new technologies, it should instead use its trusted brand to leverage early or favored access to distribution. In this regard, it can serve both as a leading content provider to children and as a reliable navigation/selection guide for adults, pointing to high-quality content whatever the source.

6. PBS Kids' first obligation is to its universally available free services. Strategic use of narrowly-available distribution, or 'premium' services, however, may be advisable in order to secure favorable positioning with emerging technologies or to capture young people's attention in venues they frequent.

Analysis

Public service media worldwide has a tradition of engineering innovation. In the US, PBS pioneered satellite delivery, closed captioning, descriptive video services, and early efforts in digital television. So, it might well be expected to take a leadership role in use of new digital distribution and utilization technologies.

In a January 21, 1998 speech celebrating *75 Years of the BBC*, then-Director General John Birt noted that, *...we are ready to pioneer in the digital age, as we have pioneered again and again throughout our history. Not pioneering for its own sake, but to deliver new and more satisfying services to our licence payers; to enable great talents to explore new possibilities, to be at the cutting edge; to ensure that the new technologies are exploited for the public good...The digital age brings with it risks as well as opportunities - the risk that the globalisation of culture will threaten national identities; that the powerful gateway controllers will restrain rather than promote diversity; the risk of a two-class society: the information rich, ready and able to pay for their increasingly expensive media, and the information poor who cannot.*

Since 1998, however, the pace of technology change and the level of financial risk necessary to influence public adoption of new devices or applications, have both multiplied. Predictions of consumer interests and business models have proved to be built on quicksand. Not only have many promising new technologies failed before achieving significant market penetration, many content developers have found that the platform for which they were creating is gone before their work is complete.

In this environment, how should public service media organizations decide where and when to invest their limited funds? At least with regard to serving children, the essential needs of the audience must come first.

Fred Rogers, in "Children's Programming on Public Television," (in Singer and Singer, *Handbook of Children and the Media*, 2001, Sage Publications) said, *the superficial stuff changes, but the essence of us remains the same. At the root of who we all are, we long to know that we are lovable and capable of loving.*

A senior marketing executive for a major US toy company, interviewed for this study, similarly said, *kids' basic needs haven't changed: to be accepted, to be loved.*

These two experts come from diametrically opposed positions – one celebrates the stuff of childhood, the other a childhood with stuff – but both agree that the trappings of today's technology are only useful to the extent they tap elemental and timeless human traits.

The implication: public service media needs to concern itself first with young people's developmental and educational needs and behaviors; doing so will clarify the most appropriate content, genre and devices for achieving the goals.

For PBS Kids' current primary audience – pre-schoolers – television is still the principal medium and parents, for the most part, the gatekeepers. For them, the Internet is not yet a medium for communication or investigation (except by their caregivers), only for extending or enhancing play with familiar characters or stories, through television program-related Web sites.

Therefore, strategic considerations toward extending public broadcasting's service to multiple platforms hinge on decisions about 'aging up' the audience for children's content.

Amplification of Recommendations

PBS Kids must be present, and its brand visible, via young people's favored media devices; however, the first consideration in all project development must be the educational goal or developmental need, not the distribution technology or device.

Trends in young people's media use over the past decade have indicated a consistent decline in television time; research by organizations like Grunwald Associates links decreases in TV use to increases in time spent online. Beyond the growing multi-media capacity of computers, a constant stream of new devices –DVDs, MP3s, digital cameras, VCRs/personal video recorders, wireless phones/pagers/PDAs, – give young people almost complete control over when, where and how they receive, use, create and share video, audio and text.

It would be easy to conclude that PBS needs to focus its attention on these emerging, interactive digital technologies and, without question, these will be components in future services. Still, it would be a mistake to build a strategic plan around devices.

The marketplace and business models are still too fluid. Public broadcasting's debates over digital television strategy, as chronicled in the March 25, 2002 edition of *Current*, testify to that. More important, the educational core of public service media demands that its content be structured and delivered in the most effective manner, and various media technologies offer different strengths and limitations.

While there is still much to be learned about the educational potential of digital media, it is apparent that they offer immediacy and dynamism. Content can be continually updated, parsed, redistributed and reconstructed to meet multiple unique needs. Digital technologies offer greater possibilities for self-directed learning, and for creating multiple levels or approaches for different learners. Certain interactive models, like online gaming or well-designed educational software, appear to promote collaboration.

Television remains the stronger medium for narrative storytelling. The medium's educational strengths (as cited by Ed Palmer more than a decade ago in his book, *Television and America's Children: A Crisis of Neglect*) remain valid today: *its ubiquity; its non-threatening, non-punitive quality as a teaching medium; its ability to organize and present information in clear and memorable ways through animated graphics; its ability to depict live role models; and its non-dependence on reading skill or ability.*

Linear television has long been promoted as enabling young people to go places they otherwise couldn't – real or imagined locations from another country to outer space to the inside of the body to the distant past to a fairy-tale kingdom. Worldwide, public service media has exploited these possibilities for years.

Now, with digital media, children can not only go to these places, they can interact within them. An educational media specialist offered a succinct description of why interactive media possibilities and public broadcasting mission are naturally aligned. He said, *some of the best technological applications that I've seen are models, simulations, or hypermedia that allow learners to try things that would be too dangerous or physically impossible in real life, either for the learner or the study object. Examples include practicing CPR on a wired dummy, or performing surgery via CD-ROM, or taking the temperature of a neutron star via Web link to a satellite. Conversely, the some of the worst applications involve substituting electronics for experiences that are better in the real world.*

Still, as one of our technology panelists, an expert on video games, noted, too much focus on devices allows an organization *...to frame its difficulties in terms of external factors, rather than concentrating on...what don't we understand about successful media in a networked society.*

Given this, are there apparent intersections between young people's media behaviors, their developmental needs, and the mission of public service media that may reveal distinctive mission-based opportunities?

Two of our experts proposed alternative frameworks for looking at media options. One focused on device attributes, citing trends indicating that young people are seeking media that are:

- always on and continually updating themselves;
- pervasive and portable – in other words, that work everywhere;
- play-based – emphasizing the powerful lure of gaming;
- peer to peer interactive – allowing young people to share work or play, without needing a media middleman; and
- user-driven, or enabling young people to create their own environments (for example, many games now include an editor, so you can add to or personalize the original).

The other focused more on the content pillars young people seek, including:

- entertainment;
- communication
- information; and
- creativity.

Taken together, these organizing principles suggest two areas where digital media development may be most advantageous for PBS.

Interactive digital technologies do appear to be the most promising avenue for PBS Kids drawing older children – 9-11-year-olds – to sample public service media, with the anticipation of using their input and interest to develop new content.

Across our panels and interviews, no one is content for PBS to limit its children's services to the youngest children. Public broadcasting needs to be a lifelong first-choice destination for engaging learning experiences. If the habit is broken at age six, it is difficult to establish again until well into adulthood.

One senior PBS executive succinctly described the challenge: *[Our] strategic planning must maintain that constant balance between a) the need and desire to explore new platforms and delivery methods, secure shelf space along with our competitors, and stretch our creative muscles through new opportunities for programming and interactivity, and b) a limited set of resources to manage and lead new initiatives while maintaining the current ones.*

Several PBS children's producers added that, because of the lengthy development process for a children's franchise, they often find themselves trying to build content for the present, while protecting possibilities for some unpredictable combination of devices young people will be using five years hence.

For the moment, television content leads children to other media far more than the converse, but in a very few years it will likely become more even or symbiotic. Already, children are less concerned with the particular medium used to deliver content, as long as the content is compelling, engaging and the experience fits their immediate desires or needs.

PBSKids.org is holding onto young people longer than its associated television programs (e.g., **Zoom** online), and the recent CPB Digital Kids funding initiative supported promising sites to engage older children.

If re-branded in order to deflect associations with PBS Kids' pre-school content, online and other digital connections could change older children's perceptions about public broadcasting. Their participation in, and reactions to, interactive digital content could guide development of attractive on-air franchises.

In this regard, competitors' models hold both promise and pitfalls.

Digital cable channels like Noggin (and the short-lived Boyz and Girlz) use Web sites effectively to engage young people, and build both brand identity and anticipation. With very small TV penetration, program promotion and behind-the-scenes information are less meaningful than unique participatory and generative content: engines that enable young people to communicate, build or play. Often (but not always), the channels' content serves as context, but it's not necessary to have seen the television programming to get full enjoyment.

Another emerging strategy has been to launch online content in anticipation of release in another medium. The strategy behind Nickelodeon's extended run-up to the film **Jimmy Neutron: Boy Genius** was detailed in a January 7, 2002 online article by John Gaffney, at *Business 2.0*. Before the movie opened, the trailer had been streamed more than 2 million times, and the *jimmyneutron.com* web site was averaging over half a million unique visits weekly.

For a well-resourced multi-media corporation like Viacom/Nickelodeon, an online launch is a great way both to build anticipation and to gauge appeal, in advance of a traditional media premiere. Corporate synergy drives traffic to its sites from multiple television channels and other related web sites, as well as print vehicles like *Nickelodeon Magazine*.

For PBS, **Cyberchase** proved the potential for an online introduction to stories and characters, as a way of building anticipation and familiarity among the 6–11-year-old audience. There are challenges, however, to exploiting the full immediacy of the Internet to influence content.

Nickelodeon is nimble enough to adjust content or strategy based on audience response. PBS Kids' series average two to three years from concept to air, and, with little risk money available, a project that is well into development or production is unlikely to be retooled or scrapped. The Web offering would have to debut long before its television companion, in order for audience response to affect substantial changes in the on-air content.

Alternatively, PBS would need to have far more risk money available, so that it could drop unsuccessful concepts in mid-production, or speed high-potential ideas. Timely concepts produced on a short lead, such as news or current events, would be exceptions, as would basic interplay like 'choose the episode' (for series with high simultaneous carriage).

Looking at digital opportunities beyond the Internet, the video game industry has become the single largest sector of the entertainment industry. The Interactive Digital Software Association 2001 U.S. sales of computer and video games grew 7.9 percent over 2000, to \$6.35 billion.

In the competition for young people's time and attention, many people cited video games as more potent than TV or the Internet. Most also saw them as an area where public service media could set new standards, and demonstrate the platforms' deeper potential. There are precedents and findings to suggest that this is a fertile area for development:

- From a business perspective, the game platform (Xbox, Playstation 2, GameCube) is only the launch pad; financial success is built upon subsequent software sales. As one production company executive pointed out, young people will remain loyal to a seemingly-obsolete piece of hardware if it supports their favorite games.

Public broadcasting's expertise, partnerships and trustworthy brand should be a strong lure to game companies eager to attract an entirely new set of hardware and software purchasers – educators and caregivers.

- From a social perspective, gamers are quick to point out that one can't make presumptions about the gender, age, class, race or culture of the person at the other end of an online encounter. Games often demand ongoing and cooperative interaction, and communication among people who may not share anything in common outside of the game. A thoughtfully-built game could be a strong engine to build bridging social capital.

IDSA research has further found that gaming is a social, not a solitary, activity – 60% of frequent players play with friends.

Moreover, gaming is hugely popular among children and teens, but IDSA statistics indicate that massive numbers of adults play, too. 42% of the most frequent *computer* game players, and 21% of the most frequent *console* gamers, are over 35. This hints at potential for an immersive strategy game (the top-selling genre in 2001) that is popular across generations.

- From an instructional perspective, the underlying structures that make gaming compelling – engagement, strategy, repetition and time-on-task – seem well-suited to teaching and learning. Gaming expert JC Herz, in an interview with Tom Peters, noted that *unlike television, [games] have a learning curve. The appealing thing about television is that it's baby food. It's all pre-chewed; all you have to do is swallow it. And that's the opposite of a game, and that's why people who play games are drawn to them. There's a level of engagement that is much stronger* (www.tompeters.com/coolfr_herz.htm).

As further evidence of this, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Microsoft have introduced a cross-disciplinary “Games-to-Teach” program, to apply what is known about gaming to the next generation of educational media.

Still, more research is needed into non-content-specific learning from gaming, such as development of spatial/visual skills, or ability to collaborate with others. PBS could be a valuable supporter and testbed for such research.

More will be needed, however, than development of thoughtful and significant curriculum-supporting games. Educators are skeptical about the platform. As one of our panel participants noted, *there is a company that produces high quality software that also runs on the Sony PlayStation.. When that company's products were first introduced to the market many teachers thought that because the software looked like and acted like a videogame that it was not as good as more inferior products that ran solely on the computer.*

This same person, however, added, *perhaps, with the convergence of the standards and accountability movement where the content of software and support for the standards will matter, teachers will be able to better discriminate quality software applications regardless of delivery platform.*

Interactive digital technologies also can help create an ‘always on’ image, at least for such time as PBS Kids remains a block on a general channel for most homes.

One of PBS Kids’ principal difficulties in attracting older children is that it is – for now – a part-time children’s service on a general-audience channel. That makes it difficult to compete against the assured instant gratification from Nickelodeon, Disney Channel or other full-time children’s channels. One public TV General Manager put in into both professional and personal terms:

Spread as we are trying to serve so many groups, our service/schedule has many built in “seams.” If you’ve ever tried to pull your kids to breakfast in the morning while they’re engrossed in Disney...and thought that you’d have better luck getting them to come to the table on the half hour, you’ve learned the hard way that those cable services are clearly presented as seamless program services with terrific flow.

...the answer isn’t just great programs, but wrestling with the whole, the look and flow of the service. As a parent, when we don’t flow my kids are quick to surf. Once they’re watching one of the well-crafted cable channels, they’re less apt to feel the need to surf.

Will digital television, with its prospect of serving multiple dedicated channels, ameliorate this problem? That’s the BBC’s strategic approach: it recently launched two full-time children’s digital channels (CBBC for older children, and CBeebies for pre-schoolers). Prior to the digital launch, children’s programming occupied only limited daily blocks on BBC1 and BBC2, but research indicated that *when* BBC offered children’s programming, 6-12 year olds chose it over competitors. They even picked BBC’s home-produced, live-action, factual programming (e.g., **Newsround**, **Blue Peter**) over imported animations.

Second, BBC expects that digital will help it reach beyond homes and into schools. Currently, there is no CBBC programming during school hours (*we’d be known as the ‘truancy channel’*). With plans for three daily interactive magazines on the older children’s digital channel, however, and much of the material to be contributed by interest-group communities of young people, CBBC can tap into the UK’s extensive after school clubs.

The UK is well ahead of the US in digital television penetration, making consumers’ needs and the competitive landscape more clear. Even so, the BBC faced considerable challenges from commercial channels in gaining government approval for its digital services.

In the US, the challenge to launching digital youth channels is likely to come from cable operators. In order to gain access to limited digital channel space, public broadcasting will have to propose services that distinguish it from other youth digital spin-offs from Nickelodeon, Discovery, Encore, Disney and others. As detailed in the March 25, 2002, *Current* article, *cable chiefs say they’re unwilling to designate bandwidth for many stations’ sketchy programming plans. Cable execs encouraged public TV to devise a more detailed plan, something beyond a vague promise of ‘educational programming,’ according to PBS.*

As addressed elsewhere in this report, the potential for localization of national content, whether on air or via community partnerships, is a distinction that the corporate cable programmers can't match. Negotiating with producers for the rights to engage in flexible digital asset management of truly educational content – so that schools and even home users can select, access and manipulate content for particular needs – will also be key.

Emerging wireless devices may also help public broadcasting create the “always on,” “pervasive and portable” environment that youths seek. ‘Texting’ and other forms of mobile communication haven't yet caught on in the US as they have among European and Asian teens (research company Ovum reported in 2001 that, except in the US, more people use wireless devices than surf the Internet); however, it seems inevitable.

Cheskin Research, in *The Wireless Future: A Look at Youth Unplugged*, predicts social connectivity and entertainment as the ‘killer apps’ of youth wireless use, with entertainment and information mostly coming in the form of ‘gap fillers’ – short-session applications.

Schools and museums, too, are looking at PDAs for distribution and organization of information. The Port Discovery Children's Museum in Baltimore distributes pagers that monitor children's movement through certain exhibitions and provide them with site-specific interactive games and tasks. A Seattle public high school is experimenting with PDAs for students to download, organize and exchange information. Some New York art galleries place a device in their front windows, that will ‘beam’ to passing pedestrians information about current exhibitions.

In 2001, Hasbro introduced Pox, a handheld game in which children – mostly boys – build a virtual alien in solo play mode. Then, they set their game unit in ‘Battle Mode,’ and their alien fights with other nearby Pox-owners' characters, via infra-red beam.

For public broadcasting, these varied developments suggest that the technology is in place, waiting to be enhanced or extended by deep, engaging, enriching content. Imagine an adaptation of Pox where, instead of fighting, young people exchanged ‘collectible’ content. They might ‘jam’ with music that they composed themselves; trade images, sounds, trivia, information, or game elements available only by completing tasks on a public broadcasting Web site.

Public broadcasting might work with community, education or business partnerships to ‘beam’ information or compact educational games and applications to wireless devices. The development costs are relatively low, and the distribution viral and grassroots.

PBS Kids should assume that technologies will diverge as much as they will converge. While young people's multi-tasking behaviors are likely to accelerate, they are indications that they will prefer parallel use of dedicated technologies over a single do-everything device.

Young people can easily juggle multiple media types, but appear to prefer controlling each independently. One device that does everything – but none of it very well – will likely be less satisfying than a small suite of devices that work well in concert. Cheskin Research, for example, suggests that the next generation of video games may call for communication via mobile phone or text.

Consider also that the most commonly proposed digital TV models – a single screen and a single remote – are interactive for only one person. This runs totally counter to young people’s desire for greater control of their media experiences. Even if there is a single screen for showing a common narrative, the audience is likely to demand individual control of interactive elements.

Content, too, will likely become divergent. There will always be a place for the narrative program, the wonderfully told story. But, as we move from a one-to-many broadcast model toward distributed media, young people are likely to be drawn to content they can control and customize. Rather than watching a 30-minute magazine, they may rather select to view two or three items from different producers on one specific topic.

While technological convergence may be hit or miss, strategic convergence will be common and extensive. Devices will have to complement, not conflict with, one another, demanding some level of collaboration among service providers. Content producers will want their brands to be present throughout young people’s lives, meaning alliances across platforms. Again, rights negotiation and management by a distributor like PBS will be vital.

Because PBS is not a big enough investor to influence public adoption of new technologies, it should instead use its trusted brand to leverage early or favored access to distribution. In this regard, it can serve both as a leading content provider to children and as a reliable navigation/selection guide for adults, pointing to high-quality content whatever the source.

Public broadcasting cannot control many factors governing adoption of new digital media. For example, US consumer adoption of digital television has been very slow. At the end of 2001, the Consumer Electronics Association reported just under 2.5 million DTV ‘products’ sold since 1998 (http://www.ce.org/market_overview/market_overview_newsroom.asp?area=21). Digital television prices still begin around \$2000, a long way from the ‘tipping point’ found by the CEA: *about 11 percent of consumers find DTV compelling at \$2,000, 17 percent at \$1,500 and 30 percent at \$1,000. The majority of those surveyed (60 percent) choose \$500 as the attractive price point for a DTV set* (<http://www.ce.org/digitalamerica/video/video2.asp>).

These figures also suggest social barriers to families’ digital conversion, with implications for television programmers.

Niche channels aren’t simply an artifact of distribution bandwidth; they thrive because TV receivers are inexpensive enough for most families to own several. As families convert to digital, few will be able to afford to replace all sets at once. Programming a children’s service for a multi-set environment is very different from building a service for homes where there is competition for control of the set. Public broadcasters would feel the effect most acutely, since they target programs for specific audiences more often than they seek mass appeal.

Because public service media isn’t big enough to move the consumer market, it has to extend its services to new technologies cautiously, considering whether the long-term strategic value exceeds the costs of adaptation.

This may mean waiting until a technology is somewhat established, but not yet at its peak. Several panelists cited a missed opportunity by US public broadcasting to launch its own cable children's channel before the explosion of niche channels. KiKa, a children's channel launched by Germany's two public broadcasters – ARD and ZDF – provides a strong example of claiming space at an opportune, still early time: its strong audience appeal was one factor in Nickelodeon closing its German dedicated channel.

Several people recommended – as a timely business venture – that public broadcasting apply its expertise toward offering customized children's media recommendations and resources, including others' content as well as its own. The information would be delivered by a variety of new and old means – everything from cell phones and PDAs to postcards – and could be a joint venture with cable and other broadband providers.

An early partnership between PBS and the major emerging gatekeepers of access to television and online content could be very wise strategically. Owning the navigation tools that search and sort the vast digital oceans of content will be invaluable. As one online panelist – an educational technology specialist – wrote: *this is a really critical issue that most media producers and distributors have yet to fully grasp. As information channels expand, the indexing, organizing, listing, and presenting of abstracts and summaries of content is as important, perhaps more important than the content itself. Because if no one accesses your content, as valuable as it may be--hmmm, if a tree falls in a forest and no one's there....*

Public service media's presence and placement on commercial Electronic Program Guides (EPGs) could be the next big public policy battlefield. In the UK, it took lengthy negotiation and threats of regulation to get thorough inclusion of BBC and ITV on Sky Digital's EPG.

EPG providers will also compete with one another, however, and this is the opening for public broadcasting. One panelist proposed: *now there's competition among search engines and which ones really give you the best results. Library and information scientists have a field day with this issue, because they understand "it's not the content, stupid!" It's the indexing of the content.*

Consumer privacy is a potential stumbling block for personal video recorders and EPGs. Will families accept a device that monitors their viewing habits, then begins to make suggestions? Would they have more faith if a trusted brand like PBS was behind the search and suggestion?

This is why a panelist suggested that, *perhaps PBS should think not just about the content of its own programming, but launching an indexing service to all content--the thinking person's guide to the media universe. Web search engines have certainly demonstrated the value (financial as well as information) of guiding users to the right content. The problem for broadcasters is to think beyond their own content, they historically only provide guides to their own content--the PBS station member guide only lists what's on that station, but its viewers are interested in other quality programming, as well.*

To apply PBS Kids' reputation and standards beyond the borders of its own services could be a value-added premium for subscribers and a paid service for non-subscribers. In any event, it is a way to foster more frequent communication between the public broadcaster and the public.

The European Broadcasting Union's Digital Strategy Group is looking at public service broadcasters' connection with the EPG, as well. Its May 2001 report, *Media with a Progressive Purpose*, noted that, *if the EPG is attractive enough, it can become the anchor for the viewer, and the centre of his or her loyalty and attention – rather than individual channels themselves. The diminishing importance of the channel as the point of departure for the viewer may precipitate changes. Public service broadcasters may need to move their branding from their channels, as it is today, closer to the programmes themselves.*

PBS Kids' first obligation is to its universally available free services. Strategic use of narrowly-available distribution, or 'premium' services, however, may be advisable in order to secure favorable positioning with emerging technologies or to capture young people's attention in venues they frequent.

As though anticipating the current environment, the Carnegie Commission on the Future of Public Broadcasting wrote, *as television and radio are joined by a host of new technological advances, the need becomes even more urgent for a non-profit institution that can assist the nation in reducing the lag between the introduction of new telecommunications devices and their widespread social benefit.*

Public broadcasting's first assessment of new platforms must be how their use might fulfill its mission of serving all Americans with non-commercial services of educational significance. Therefore, a strong foundation of free and universally available content is vital, and should be public service media's top priority.

If, however, public broadcasting adheres slavishly to the concept of universal access, it can never succeed on emerging platforms that are – or will be – most popular among young people, such as digital TV, wireless devices, or games. If it waits until a technology achieves even majority penetration, commercial interests will have claimed the prime positions, leaving public service media to operate at the fringe.

The European Broadcasting Union concurs. Its Digital Strategy report to members recommends, *the best policy would be to be present on "all significant media and platforms."*

A museum educational technology expert amplified this point, saying public broadcasting needs *always to be a player in providing material for different channels of communication, so that while no one is completely excluded, there is also a presence on developing opportunities so that public broadcasting is not completely excluded...universal access does not necessarily need to mean access to everything universally . The significant market penetration of new communication technologies can be quite rapid and if one is not present in the early years, it is often hard to be present in the later years.*

The most basic illustration of this is that the US waited until commercial services were well established before carving out a public broadcasting space. As a result, US public broadcasting in many ways mimics the commercial model, and has been chronically under-funded. In much of the rest of the world, public service broadcasting was established first and on a strong footing before commercial channels were allowed.

Public service media needs freedom to leverage its reputation and expertise into emerging areas. In this way, it can set standards for quality, serve as a testbed, and be a ‘player’ without major monetary/risk investment.

Universal access might be considered from another perspective, as well. One licensee technology expert wrote, *our commitment to "universal access" is a convenient argument to use when seeking federal funding, but it means little in terms of social impact if it means "available to" rather than "used by."* We have succeeded in making our broadcast signals available to 98% of USTVHHs; the usage of those signals, however, is far from universal.

We know that for at least the next 10-15 years, we are more likely to achieve "universal access" via cable and DVDs than we will via digital broadcasting, and for the remainder of this decade, analog broadcasting will continue to be our primary broadcast distribution platform (mostly via cable) with the greatest actual reach.

So I wouldn't shy away from using our best efforts to make our content and services available on any and all new technologies with which kids are spending time, even if access to those particular technologies is not now and is unlikely to be "universal". If access to those technologies is more limited, but actual usage by those who have access is higher, we may achieve a greater net level of social utility.

A sociologist added, *to what do we aim to give universal access? Surely we don't mean to technologies, themselves, but to useful information and insights about living in America, today.*

Public broadcasting must make every effort to ensure that its core services to young people don't exacerbate the digital divide:

- Free content must be the most thoughtful, engaging and well-researched.
- When a premium service ‘piggybacks’ on a free service, the free service user must get complete, satisfying content. (For example, could pressure to add value for a device similar to Microsoft’s “Actimates” – that responds to signals delivered with the free-to-air broadcast – distract the writer from creating the best possible story for viewers without the toy?)
- Producers should anticipate social settings in which their content will be used, and work to counter known inequities (race, class, gender, urban/rural, home vs. school/community computer access), so that all children have a beneficial and fulfilling experience. Ready to Learn services, and other extensions beyond screen content, are critical to this effort.
- Where possible, technologies may be combined to extend access. For example, rich online media requiring broadband access might also be offered via DVD.

AMPLIFICATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS: SECTION 3:

Public service media are often non-commercial, but not anti-commerce.

For PBS Kids, this means:

Experience dictates that some value-added marketing and merchandising is not only acceptable but desirable, as a means for extending enjoyment and learning beyond the screen. By ascertaining parents' and educators' understanding of 'non-commercial,' PBS Kids sets clear limits that distinguish its public service nature from its commercial counterparts.

Recommendations

1. PBS should initiate research into parents' and educators' practical expectations about its non-commercial stature. Crucial areas to probe are differences in attitudes regarding home-use and school-use content, and parents' ability to discern between local (often more permissive) and national underwriting messages.

This research will guide financial models and rules for services such as branded merchandise, strategic alliances with for-profit companies, and supplementary 'premium' services.

2. Marketing value lies principally with public broadcasting's content and character sub-brands. This allows PBS Kids to maintain some distance from merchandising and sustain its "we're not selling anything but learning" message. To uphold this point, however, PBS Kids must place educational necessity before merchandising potential in commissioning, development or acquisition of multi-media content. Except for works based on pre-existing, education-based content (e.g., books, software, learning tools), merchandising should never precede the public broadcasting premiere.
3. Public broadcasting must codify strong standards against commercial 'creep' into content, regardless of platform. Digital recorders are likely to enable viewers to bypass stand-alone commercials, making all TV programming non-commercial in practice. The resulting search for a viable economic model will almost certainly increase commercial references embedded in content, on air and online. Public broadcasting must then be distinctive not only for uninterrupted content, but for uninfluenced content.
4. Content development and re-branding necessary for PBS Kids to become engaging and authentic to the next oldest age groups (especially 9-11) will demand substantial increase in financial commitment. Ready to Learn funds can underpin young children's content, but this doesn't reduce the need for growing National Program Service support, pegged to children's services' proportion of hours in the NPS schedule.

5. Public broadcasting needs to advocate vigorously for a coherent ‘second generation’ of federal funding. As government support wanes for narrowing the digital divide through infrastructure, the argument should be based on innovative strategies and partnerships for endowing the now-established communications network with wide-ranging, educational, multi-platform content.

Analysis

Throughout this study, the most difficult task has been to deduce financial models or principles by which public broadcasting can maintain its non-commercial birthright while adequately supporting the kind of distributed-media, multi-platform development, production, distribution, promotion and outreach that is vital to fulfilling the public service media mission.

Even when people agreed substantially on technological expansion, mission priorities and content opportunities, they often differed 180° on how to fund it:

- A senior toy industry marketer said his company would love to underwrite for PBS, if only it offered more leeway for *adding value beyond underwriting credits – perhaps allowing branded contests or online promotions*. A leading children’s media advocate countered, *keep commercialism away from programming; that’s what will kill public broadcasting*.
- An Internet strategy consultant strongly advocated for adding a premium tier to public broadcasting’s online service, since *educational/children’s offerings...have always been considered among the most likely to be considered premium-friendly "critical information," and one of the areas where price is regularly associated with perceived value*. A licensee’s head of online services, however, argued that *we are here to serve the public and gating taxpayer-supported content behind a subscription is in my opinion an idea that will only encourage Congress to look at reducing our funding even more*. [Also, this model] *has repeatedly failed for companies that already charge for content*.
- A corporate strategy consultant lauded the fact that *PBS pays little for rights to most children’s programming, because producers are eager for the airtime in order to generate back end*. A competing children’s channel programmer, by contrast, warned that public broadcasting’s distinction rests on not *making choices of what goes on the air based on financial potential, [but on] evaluating what is working and extending the value*.
- System professionals expressed concern about public broadcasting-developed content appearing on other outlets (e.g., **Magic Schoolbus**). Strategists and even competing programming executives suggested that public service media could serve a unique and potentially lucrative function as a ‘media lab,’ selling or sharing successful models.

Financial strategies are complicated by the fact that they need to work for three parties: PBS, the content producer, and the system licensees.

Producers, in particular, are dissatisfied. Many complain of declining public broadcasting license fees, which they attribute to some companies' willingness to absorb costs in anticipation of back end revenues, and Canadian producers' access to government subsidies. Others feel current PBS contracts make funding seem more like a loan than either a grant or an investment in which PBS would share in the financial risk.

Some believe (this is difficult to document) that National Program Service funds for children's content should have grown more – that Ready to Learn funding supplanted, not supplemented, NPS dollars. Producers sense that PBS Kids serves as the organization's cash cow, and want assurance that funds recouped from children's franchises are reinvested in children's services.

(It is interesting to note that the recent FCC decision allowing public television to use a piece of its digital spectrum for commercial purposes could reverse this trend, since it must be assumed that any children's digital service will be non-commercial and sustained by other spectrum uses.)

Licensee concerns about financial models mostly dealt with viability of local adaptations for national initiatives. One station's online strategist suggested that *smaller stations have difficulty securing foundation and corporate grants and exist primarily on small business or local business underwriting. But this type of fundraising just pays the bills. It's the national foundations that give grants to enable innovative projects. The current system seems to favor those stations that are able to produce at that national level. I would like to see more cooperative efforts that enable smaller stations to be innovative as well.*

This view was repeated in the comments a children's media advocate, who said, *PBS can make deals that return more money to itself than to the stations – if its choices depend on funding [PBS] that won't serve anybody.*

An interactive strategist and strong advocate for premium online services to generate revenue, highlighted their local potential: *They contain within them an attractive, relatively non-controversial role for potential sponsors at both the local and national level – the opportunity for a sponsor to provide free access to the premium offerings for their local communities or disadvantaged populations. They can also help a site address the labor-intense nature of meeting user demands for interactivity – sites can provide free access to their premium services to teachers and other volunteers in exchange for help in moderating and other community needs.*

Difficult as it is to find a winning financial model, some commercial companies look longingly at public broadcasting. Writing for a National Research Council/Institute of Medicine panel on strategies for protecting children online (http://bob.nap.edu/html/protecting_children/ch15.html), the founder of a now-defunct protected Internet content environment for children proposed that, *PBS is the PBS of the Web--it is out there online. Maybe not enough people know about it, but this may be a good model going forward (it is one that I was toying with late in the game). We could create nonprofit organizations that license commercial technology and work in that space, and corporations that want to do good work can sponsor good educational content.*

Amplification of Recommendations

PBS should initiate research into parents' and educators' practical expectations about its non-commercial stature. Crucial areas to probe are differences in attitudes regarding home-use and school-use content, and parents' ability to discern between local (often more permissive) and national underwriting messages.

This research will guide financial models and rules for services such as branded merchandise, strategic alliances with for-profit companies, and supplementary 'premium' services.

Public broadcasting's strongest opportunities for generating revenue depend on engaging parents. Its current 'long suit' – pre-school content – is aimed at children unable to differentiate commercial content from story, making marketing inherently unfair. In any case, at that early age, buying power rests with parents (that purchase power is considerable: a recent *Wall Street Journal* article cited a Disney estimate that pre-school brand sales are over \$21 billion annually).

Public service media's unique selling proposition – well-documented educational content that also entertains – has little cachet for children, but has strong parental appeal. Finally, marketing to parents keeps PBS within the letter of its claim that its programs *do not seek to sell anything to young viewers except the fun and excitement of learning*.

PBS is currently engaged in a thorough exploration of parents' attitudes and interests, as a target group for building membership. Existing research indicates that parents value the educational content and 'safe harbor' reliability of public broadcasting.

The depth of those beliefs is less clear. One PBS children's series producer cited two pieces of research that seem cautionary for public broadcasting: one said that parents have low expectations for television as an educational medium; the other indicated that many parents already believe PBS runs commercials.

Therefore, an important part of PBS' research with parents – one that may lend substantial insight into their reasoning about supporting public television – will be a multi-faceted investigation of parents' perceptions of public broadcasting's non-commercial stature.

Because PBS Kids programming is often used both at home and in schools or child care centers, and because public broadcasting has relatively high trust among educators, any study of commercial perceptions should include teachers and caregivers, as well.

- Is the absence of commercial interruptions central to parents' preference for public television's children's services (compared with program content or other factors)? Do they distinguish – and can they articulate – a difference between underwriting and product or service advertising?

- Producers of PBS Kids' national series suggested that this question be extended to ascertain whether parents differentiate local and national underwriting messages. Local restrictions are often less stringent than PBS'; if this discrepancy dilutes or negates public broadcasting's non-commercial image, it needs to be rectified.
- Are parents' standards for online underwriting different from their expectations for TV? If sponsorship or promotion messages don't interrupt content (as on-air messages necessarily do), are they more accepting?
- Does certain program-related merchandise give parents pause about commercialism creeping into public broadcasting? By contrast, is there program-related merchandise that they are eager to have? Do their feelings differ if a program is intended solely for home use versus those used also in schools or care centers? Are their concerns different for products for toddlers than for merchandise aimed at older children?
- Are parents aware that, usually, a portion of proceeds from merchandise featuring PBS Kids brands is returned to supporting public broadcasting's service to children? Would that information be influential to their purchasing?
- What would items carrying the PBS Kids imprimatur – rather than that of a single program or character – mean to parents or educators/caregivers? Would it make learning materials – books, videotapes, DVDs, software – more trustworthy? Would they more readily infer educational quality for something not usually associated with learning, such as a video game?
- Especially in the area of educational technology, under what circumstances can the PBS Kids brand co-exist easily with other, more commercial brands? For example, would parents and caregivers react differently to a PBS Kids-branded game for a PC than to the same game for the X-Box? Do perceptions of those who access PBS Kids via AOL differ at all from those who link directly through PBSKids.org?

Apart from technology, how do parents react when public broadcasting branded toys are included in fast-food children's meals? Is the public service mission or service diluted when content appears on PBS and other channels (e.g., when **Bill Nye** was shared with Disney, or **Sesame Street** on Noggin)?

- Would parents pay for access to enhanced educational services – online or in an emerging digital TV environment – that offered either unique content or extensions of existing public broadcasting brands? Would they embrace a local membership option that granted access to added services?

Marketing value lies principally with public broadcasting's content and character sub-brands. This allows PBS Kids to maintain some distance from merchandising and sustain its "we're not selling anything but learning" message. To uphold this point, however, PBS Kids must place educational necessity before merchandising potential in commissioning, development or acquisition of multi-media content. Except for works based on pre-existing, education-based content (e.g., books, software, learning tools), merchandising should never precede the public broadcasting premiere.

For the most part, PBS Kids should allow its individual content sub-brands (e.g., **Arthur**, **Angelina Ballerina**, **Dragon Tales**) to lead the way in merchandising, licensing or marketing.

Every manufacturing, marketing and retail expert that was interviewed agreed: “PBS Kids” is not a strong merchandising brand. As one business consultant characterized it, *you wouldn’t want to make PBS Kids Beanie Babies*. A toy industry marketer said the PBS Kids brand would have little value to his company without *pass through rights* to the individual programs.

Given public broadcasting’s recognition and trustworthiness with teachers, the PBS Kids brand may have influence in building school-and-home connections. Especially in the current standards-oriented education environment, PBS Kids might serve as an imprimatur of quality for products or technologies designed to supplement learning or connect parents with schools.

As a leader in using media to foster child-centered learning, the PBS Kids brand will appeal to parents who, according to a toy retailing leader, are *absolutely looking for educational value in toys and games they buy. They want to buy technology, to be sure their kids are up to speed in the current environment...at the same time, they’re concerned about sustaining imagination, so toys where the child applies the play pattern are important to them.*

Still, PBS is in a challenging position. Even as it allows its sub-brands to carry the weight of merchandising, its own reputation is inextricably tied to those marketing efforts, and perceptions of excess will tar the entire public broadcasting system with charges of commercialism.

Sales successes are a double-edged sword in any case. While a **Teletubbies** or **Barney** demonstrates that programs designed with children’s developmental needs in mind can be both popular and financially viable, they create an expectation that merchandising juggernauts can be repeated at will. This is dangerous on a number of fronts:

- Governmental funders may question public support in the mistaken belief that all children’s programming is profitable;
- Potential members may feel their contribution is less necessary;
- Commercial companies may be disinclined to support special considerations for public service media (e.g., digital must-carry) or to enter into joint efforts (the programming head of a children’s cable channel said she would *like to collaborate with public TV, but only if it doesn’t act like a competitor*);
- Feeling that their success is measured by return on investment, producers may pursue only marketable ideas, and avoid risk taking;
- Equally if not more important, to the extent that PBS comes to expect a certain level of return on investment, it may become less willing to take creative risks and serve niche or under-served audiences.

This presents a dilemma. To protect its public service mission, PBS should exert substantial control over character or content licensing for works it distributes. Until it can invest more in those works and become a true partner, however, it is difficult to expect producers to cede that power. In any event, PBS should advocate for the following principles (recognizing that the research recommended above may sharpen or alter these recommendations):

- Proposals for development or acquisition should be considered independently of commercial potential, until consensus has been reached on whether the concept fulfills the public broadcasting mission and established curriculum needs.
- Except for works based on pre-existing, education-based content (e.g., books, software, learning tools), merchandising should never precede the public broadcasting premiere. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, *to avoid the whiff of over-commercialization and to carefully build demand...Nickelodeon designs its merchandise rollouts to proceed slowly and methodically*. **Dora the Explorer** product sales launched a year after the series.
- The same quality standards that apply to on-air and online content should be used for related merchandise. To the extent possible, the type and range of products should suit the content. One panelist proposed that public service media merchandise meet a standard of *providing socially redeeming value that the market can't or won't provide on its own*; however, this seems too restrictive.
- Especially in a cross-platform environment, where young people may access similar content simultaneously across multiple devices, PBS must take care that business considerations don't impinge on free-to-all content. A child viewing public television at home should be able to get full value from the program, even if he or she doesn't have Internet access, a particular wireless communication or gaming device, or any similar play or learning tool.

Licensing or merchandising revenue from children's content that is returned to PBS should primarily and substantially help sustain and expand PBS Kids; in particular, it should endow mission-critical works that are not marketable. Panelists that recommended this policy usually cited it as a marketing point that would appeal to parents, educators and policy makers.

Public broadcasting must codify strong standards against commercial 'creep' into content, regardless of platform. Digital recorders are likely to enable viewers to bypass stand-alone commercials, making all TV programming non-commercial in practice. The resulting search for a viable economic model will almost certainly increase commercial references embedded in content, on air and online. Public broadcasting must then be distinctive not only for uninterrupted content, but for uninfluenced content.

A February 25, 2002, article in the Harvard Business School publication, *Working Knowledge* (<http://www.hbsworkingknowledge.hbs.edu>) quoted Thomas McGrath, Executive Vice President of Viacom's Entertainment Group, saying, *If you want to see the future of television, go out and buy a TiVo. It's deconstructing the concept of scheduled TV. Over 80 percent of consumers with TiVo never watch a commercial at all.*

As digital personal video recorders gain penetration, and no viewer *has to* watch advertisements, what will become of public broadcasting's non-commercial distinction?

This will depend substantially on how commercial media outlets respond to this massive challenge. Perhaps the most commonly proposed television scenario is that commercial content will be built directly into programming – either through product placement on-screen or via click-and-shop opportunities in an interactive environment.

Already, on the Internet, the line between content and advertising is often blurred as companies present branded playgrounds with games, stories and activities. One panelist, an online strategist, suggested that this trend will intensify. *...Sponsors are beyond the static "sponsored by" model and looking to be more integrated into the "lifeblood" of the sites they sponsor...one way to do it...is for these sites to develop incentive systems within their offerings...(for kids to tell their friends about the sites, for kids to contribute to the sites, explore them, achieve within them, etc.), and to integrate the sponsors into these systems in a variety of ways, anything from letting the sponsors be associated with the congratulatory mail ("Congratulations from your friends at...") to having sponsor logos integrated into the "currency" of the site, to allowing kids to "buy" sponsor-provided prizes when they get certain levels of that currency, to having key online awards named after sponsor founders or other key figures...*

If these emerge as dominant models, the distinguishing mark of public broadcasting will shift from *uninterrupted* programming to *uncorrupted* programming – a guarantee to parents of no embedded commercial content. Concerns in this regard already have been expressed. An April 24, 2001, *New York Times* article addressed AOL's underwriting of **Sesame Street** coincident with the increased role of computers – and even a dancing computer announcing *You've Got Mail* – on the program.

Content development and re-branding necessary for PBS Kids to become engaging and authentic to the next oldest age groups (especially 9-11) will demand substantial increase in financial commitment. Ready to Learn funds can underpin young children's content, but this doesn't reduce the need for growing National Program Service support, pegged to children's services' proportion of hours in the NPS schedule.

Public service media is in the fortunate position not to be held to a strict 'return on investment' yardstick. Opportunities without sufficient margin to satisfy investors, especially in the current retrenchment, could be adequate to sustain public broadcasting, especially as part of a multi-platform model. As one panelist noted, *"NewKidsShow" is not a TV program -- it's a property that gets distributed in different ways. Some of those distribution mechanisms are loss-leaders, some are break-even, some make money. Seen as part of the overall budget, NewKidsShow can be a huge success -- it doesn't particularly matter if the outreach component makes money or the web component, or even the TV show...as long as the overall model makes sense.*

But, this approach is incomplete. To judge every "NewKidsShow" on its potential to self-support will inhibit public broadcasting from controlling its commissioning and acquisition process, and from taking essential risks. Edward Palmer, in his 1988 book, *Television and America's Children: A Crisis of Neglect* issued a caution that is still true today:

...we still lack the level of assured funding that would allow us even to stand still. Funds with which to expand on or revise successful program series are almost totally lacking; funds to start new productions are in only slightly greater supply. With enough funds to create only one major new series every few years, we have had to learn to chase the most urgent education crisis of the moment...This ad hoc approach at least has given us a successful and highly visible era of demonstration activities. But we are moving far too slowly, and as we step from crisis to crisis, the ground gained crumbles away behind us...

US public broadcasting has long argued to federal, state, local and private funders that its children's services are the embodiment and heart of the public service media mission. Later, this section will address strategies for making this argument to the federal government, to advocate for increased financial support.

At present, however, there is no fund analogous to "Ready to Learn" for older children. There is no stable platform from which to reach out to the next age group – 9- to 11-year-olds – with a comprehensive media, education and community alliance, as has been successful with early-childhood learning.

The older audience is the least well served by media, with plenty of content aimed there, but little that serves developmental needs beyond superficial social learning. It's a demanding audience with expensive tastes: live-action drama and comedy like Nickelodeon and Disney serials or films like *Harry Potter*; animation that matches Cartoon Network or movies like *Shrek*; and what one panelist described as *intensely interactive experiences (including a heavy degree of interactive with you – or your surrogates)*. This audience is among the most receptive and, therefore, most targeted by commercial messages. With so many media options, just breaking through the clutter to inform and attract the 9- to 11-year-old is a costly enterprise.

If PBS is truly committed to public service media as a lifelong resource, it has no choice but to engage this audience. But, it must be especially vigorous in setting and pursuing priorities, or – more than for any other age group – it will be at the mercy of producers eager to exploit back-end potential. This kind of control demands internal commitment to stable, forward-looking funding for development, production, outreach and – without question for this audience – ubiquitous promotion.

PBS's commitment to PBS Kids has fluctuated between 17% and 21% of the National Program Service budget since FY99 – aside from a one-year spike in FY01 (\$30.5 million), the actual dollar amount has been relatively flat (between \$26.5 million \$28 million). With the exception of FY00 (\$0), Ready to Learn funding has accounted for approximately 20% of that spending.

(While differences in the governmental model and other factors make the comparison somewhat 'apples to oranges,' it is interesting to note that this year's CBBC budget – for blocks on two terrestrial channels, two full-time digital channels, and interactive services – is approximately \$142 million. The US population of children 14 and under is six times that of the UK.)

Public broadcasting needs to advocate vigorously for a coherent ‘second generation’ of federal funding. As government support wanes for narrowing the digital divide through infrastructure, the argument should be based on innovative strategies and partnerships for endowing the now-established communications network with wide-ranging, educational, multi-platform content.

For most people we interviewed, government funding offers the best prospects for expanding public broadcasting’s children’s services, without threatening its educational mission or non-commercial nature. The current environment is ideally-suited to public investment in the future quality of young people’s digital media world.

An advocacy group representative wrote, *if you think about how technology has historically been developed in this country to the very high level at which it stands today, public funding has been a major source...After the initial high investment was made, many (if not most) of those technologies were turned over to the private sector...One could argue that a similar pattern happened in the UK (and elsewhere) with the development of public TV first, followed by the commercial channels.*

This view was expanded upon by a digital media consultant: *[Public broadcasting needs to] convince Congress that we are at the same point in the Net's development as we were with television in the 1960's. It's not going to continue to move forward in positive directions unless a commitment to publicly funded Internet services is made that's tantamount to the investment made in the 1960s. The case is, in some ways, more compelling now than it was then: if not for government funding, there would be no Internet at all. Aren't the taxpayers entitled to have quality programming that's clearly in the public interest running on this medium that they paid for, where that content is available to all citizens, free of charge (as many of the best Internet educational services already are *not*, with more headed in that direction)?*

The argument for federal support of public service media content is timely and vital.

In recent months, the Administration has slashed two proven-effective federal programs that helped to extend media technology access to all Americans – the Department of Education's Community Technology Centers (CTC) and the Technology Opportunities Program (TOP) at the Department of Commerce. The Administration’s rationale – not necessarily born out by statistics – was that adequate progress was being made in equitable distribution of technology, and that it was therefore time to allow the marketplace to take over.

This policy opens a door for public broadcasting to advocate for a ‘second generation’ of federal funding, to ensure that the networks already laid will be filled with worthwhile content. Only in this way will the government’s investment in infrastructure pay long-term dividends in education, civil society and a capable workforce.

A public broadcasting executive described both the argument, and what is needed to win it: *There hasn't been a substantial public investment in online or other new media platforms. Given how much time kids spend with them, we need public investment to make sure their time is well spent. To convince Congress of this, we need to get great producers using unique capabilities of new technologies for better learning experiences, then we'll have a better story to tell.*

The blueprint for this type of support exists, in the Digital Opportunity Investment Trust (DO-IT) proposal by former PBS President Larry Grossman, and former FCC Chair Newton Minow. Their proposal calls for setting aside the revenue from future radio spectrum auctions to create a trust fund of up to \$18 million, for educational innovation in digital media. The beneficiaries would include public broadcasting, but others including universities, museums, libraries and other non-profits would be eligible for support, as well.

As tempting as it might be for public broadcasting to approach Congress solely on its own behalf, prospects for success will likely be enhanced by a broad-based initiative like DO-IT. As Richard Somerset-Ward pointed out in his address to the 2001 FirstView screening, *How many budget lines are there (in government budgets, in corporate and philanthropic budgets) that bear the legend “public television”? Almost none. But how many are there that carry the rubrics of Education or Public Health or Civic Democracy or Community? Hundreds, thousands.*

Moreover, the multi-disciplinary approach of the Grossman-Minow plan meshes perfectly with the role for public service media described in another section of this report – to serve as a hub for local, national and global networks of people and organizations. In partnership with these other educational institutions, public broadcasters could provide the public face, dissemination platform, and the nexus for interactivity for the full range of digital educational investments.

Other avenues of government support are worth exploring, as well. For example, the National Endowment for Children’s Educational Television – created as part of the Children’s Television Act of 1990, and eliminated three years later – was a good idea that was never taken far enough.

The Congressional allocation –\$2.5 million per year at its highest – was insufficient to launch entire new series. Funds were parceled out for partial development or project completion. To its credit, by spreading its support, NECET was able to endorse the concept that children’s TV should range widely in genre, style and topic; moreover, many of its initiatives made it to air (e.g., **Arthur**, **The Eddie Files**, **Where in Time is Carmen Sandiego?**, **Get Real!**).

Further, the Department of Commerce never put its weight behind leveraging the government funds. It could have had considerable influence, hosting a ‘program fair’ for the works it had nurtured, and inviting major corporations to match or multiply the federal grants.

A common recommendation from producers was to advocate for funding or incentives to keep children’s television production in the United States. Even the programming head for a children’s cable channel challenged, *if you are a publicly funded entity, how much of your programming time goes to non-US production companies and creators? It would be great to see US public television looking to develop economic models to keep money here...if it was looking for innovative roles for the government, what about a tax credit...to get shows off the ground, and be a participant in the back end, in order to sustain the fund?*

Children’s programming has always been public broadcasting’s ‘magic bullet’ in dealing with Congress. In the 1990’s, no legislator wanted to be the one who ‘killed Big Bird.’

In 2002, however, Big Bird also appears on Noggin. Headlines trumpet public television's multi-million-dollar merchandising bonanzas. Other organizations – Cable in the Classroom, for example – are gaining attention in Congress with their own stories of educational efficacy, without federal funding. Even the leading children's media advocate – someone with enormous clout among legislators – says of PBS' current services, *if that's all they're going to do, they don't deserve to have a trust fund for kids.*

If public broadcasting is to make the case for increasing public funding, it must – as recommended throughout this paper – sharpen its children's mission and services. It needs to differentiate itself from the myriad other channels, web sites and educational media companies. Equally important, it needs to present a multi-platform plan that demonstrates clearly that public broadcasting's digital expansion is neither cannibalistic nor duplicative. The Controller of children's services at the BBC offers a model: *I don't regard the new digital channels as competing with our analog presence or vice versa. The entire CBBC service is an organic one. The digital channels and CBBC's airtime on BBC1 and 2 are mutually supportive, feeding and nourishing each other. Each of these different and highly distinctive services is wholly committed to backing the wide range of programmes – drama, factual, entertainment, pre-school – that has always been the driving force of the BBC's offering for children.*

AMPLIFICATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS: SECTION 4:

**Public service media organizations are the hub
of a wide-ranging network of partnerships.
They use local, national and international alliances
to welcome and prepare children
as citizens of their communities, nation and world.**

For PBS Kids, this means:

Public service media can provide a blend of information, ideas and connections that enable children to explore and expand their world at developmentally-appropriate times and pace.

Unlike any other US broadcast, cable, satellite or online service, public broadcasting is locally owned and operated, but with strong national content and international associations.

It is uniquely suited to position itself at the center of a grid of ongoing partnerships beyond the screen – with educational, cultural, civic and religious institutions; parents’ and professional groups; governments and non-governmental organizations; youth groups and clubs; hardware and software companies; even with other media outlets.

Recommendations

Recommendations are presented in three ‘circles’:

- Local presence, public broadcasting’s defining distinction;
- National content that probes – not simply reflects – American diversity;
- Global windows for a generation with few borders.

Local presence, public broadcasting’s defining distinction

1. Instead of sequential *ad hoc* alliances that serve short-term or single-program purposes, PBS should secure long-term strategic partnerships with a limited number of organizations that are national in scope but present in local communities. Licensees can supplement the national collaborations with specific local alliances, thereby positioning public broadcasters as the digital hub of a coherent, extended community ‘web’ of action, information and resources.
- Every partnership must:
 - Measurably advance one or more of public service media’s education goals;

- Effectively leverage public service media's core resource – multi-platform educational content designed expressly for children and their caregivers;
 - Provide access to new technological, promotional and/or financial resources;
 - Use existing structures – especially locally – rather than building new bureaucracies;
 - Be sustainable over time; and
 - Include a mechanism for listening to the target audience, in order to review and refine the partnership at the national and local level.
2. Turnkey projects – like the *Zoom* local/national initiative – that enable licensees to give a community *look and feel* to national content across platforms, will remain a unique possibility for public broadcasting, and are potentially a powerful draw for young people.

National content that probes – not simply reflects – American diversity

1. Public service media must examine, explore and reinforce cultural diversity. A cast of varied characters who interact and empathize is necessary, but not sufficient.
 - Currently, PBS Kids is heavily weighted toward animated fiction. It will be difficult to present themes of cultural diversity with sufficient depth and context that children can relate them to their own lives, without additional live-action and non-fiction content.
 - Achieving genuine diversity of perspectives and voices demands that PBS Kids seek opportunities to engage a broader range of American producers.

A global window for a generation with few borders

1. Post-September 11 research for PBS by its advertising agency stated it clearly: *Globalism is now a forced perspective*. Yet, almost no US television programming explores or contrasts how young people live elsewhere in the world. Public service media can distinguish itself by creating regular and ongoing on-air and online vehicles for presenting world cultures. A focus on world youth and popular culture, in particular, could be an attractive means for extending the age range of PBS audiences.
2. PBS should develop a context for occasional features from, or links to, other countries' outstanding or innovative children's media. Beyond its entertainment value, this can be packaged as a media literacy exercise, as media choices provide remarkable insight into a nation's view of children's growth, learning and fun.

As one aspect, PBS should revitalize its participation with the European Broadcasting Union, and take part in its international program exchanges. This is an inexpensive means for acquiring content that provides a window into other world cultures.

3. Digital media offer opportunities to facilitate exploration by older children across borders and cultures. Many elements of video gaming don't rely on language. With thoughtful content in keeping with its mission – perhaps in partnership with other public service media outlets – PBS Kids could become a testbed for new methods of culture exchange.

Analysis

Early research into effects on children of the September 11 attacks on the US suggest that young people are responding with eagerness to help – to contribute to their communities. Sesame Workshop conducted a flash update of its investigation of attitudes among ‘middle years’ children: two principal findings were that *children want to help and national and community connectedness is giving children strength*. A developmental psychologist and researcher on our “Children and Families” panel puts these findings in context: *It's a known research dynamic of trauma recovery that involvement in one's small and larger community -- such as family and neighborhoods will predict more positive recoveries*.

Well before last September, though, young people's interest in community service was well documented. Nickelodeon's “Big Help” campaigns over the past decade have tapped into this spirit, and generated millions of hours of good works by children nationwide.

On air and online, public service media can provide children with inspiration, strategies and knowledge for getting involved. Then, because of its unique local/national structure, public broadcasting can – and already does – enter into partnerships with other community-based organizations, and establish the means for young people to turn their inspiration into action.

In moving to a digital infrastructure, public broadcasters will become public service telecommunications complexes, using an array of platforms and partnerships to improve communication between families and schools, build access-anywhere interactive applications that extend the learning and play of children's favorite programs, facilitate community dialogue, and much more.

Such local alliances are a distinguishing feature of public service media. Disney, Nickelodeon, Discovery and AOL have no local transmitters, production centers or studios; and no community-based program managers, outreach coordinators or education specialists. As one station's education director stressed:

This is our strength and what sets us apart. We can help kids connect with local efforts rather than being just another "one-size fits all" media with nameless towns and few local connections.

Taken another step, as media become increasingly global and consolidated, they often sacrifice any sense of local or national flavor, in favor of worldwide distribution potential.

Perhaps the biggest difference public service media can offer, therefore, is to connect children with their own and other cultures, nurturing young people's awareness about their neighborhood, city, country and world.

Given the size and diversity of America, and children's developmental abilities, a culturally-relevant media service has to exist on multiple levels:

- Every community has its own composition, history, traditions, and resources, and these elements – on screen and equally if not more so beyond them – will be most tangible and real for young audiences.
- National content can tell broader stories of America's varied people.
- International partnerships and presentations can promote the kind of global context, depth, respect and understanding that seem in short supply these days.

Public broadcasting may even find that inclusiveness is good business practice. A senior marketing executive noted in an interview for this project that, by 2003, Latinos will account for 50% of toy purchases.

There are many more possibilities than can be pursued, however, and public service media partnerships and alliances must be managed carefully against a strict set of priorities.

Amplification of Recommendations

Local presence, public broadcasting's defining distinction

Instead of sequential *ad hoc* alliances that serve short-term or single-program purposes, PBS should secure long-term strategic partnerships with a limited number of organizations that are national in scope but present in local communities. Licensees can supplement the national collaborations with specific local alliances, thereby positioning public broadcasters as the digital hub of a coherent, extended community 'web' of action, information and resources.

Partnerships should measurably advance one or more of public service media's education goals.

All producers would like their children's series to be the centerpiece of an outreach project. Public service media licensees simply don't have sufficient staff or resources, however, to devote adequate attention to so many unique efforts. Everyone is frustrated when promises made for local support can't be fulfilled – PBS, licensees, producers, national organizations, community partners, children and parents.

Therefore, just as with content commissioning, PBS must actively manage judicious selection of national/state/local partnerships. A coherent array of extended, goal-based alliances – rather than program-by-program partnerships – can build synergy across PBS Kids' sub-brands, instead of competition among them. It can also facilitate licensees' positioning of their digital resources as community portals that are far more than promotional vehicles for television content.

Limiting the number of national-level efforts would also leave licensees with flexibility to undertake local partnerships that target specific needs and engage specific assets in their communities. If coherence and ‘breathing space’ make it feasible for more markets to participate fully in national campaigns, it may resolve an issue raised by one PBS executive: *the challenge is how to harness the power of the collective network of stations while not compromising the localized/customized market agendas.*

Partnerships should effectively leverage public service media’s core resource – multi-platform distributed educational content designed expressly for children and their caregivers.

Public service media can be a vital partner in children’s lives and learning, but not a panacea for gaps in care for children. It can teach nutrition, but can’t supply a good breakfast. It can strengthen parents’ competence, but can’t offer every child a nurturing adult. It can transport children to far-away places both real and imaginary, but can’t make actual neighborhoods safe.

There are organizations at the community, state and national level whose missions, positioning and resources are structured to address direct service needs. Often, it will make sense for public broadcasting to partner with these groups in symbiotic relationships that attract viewers (and, ultimately, members), boost awareness for both parties, and build social capital by connecting young people with their communities in very tangible ways.

But, while acknowledging that public broadcasting is an education and community resource, it is specifically an education and community media resource. Therefore, a guiding principle in accepting and structuring partnerships must be the extent to which they benefit from application of mass-media and/or distributed-media expertise and infrastructure. Public broadcasters run the risk of overextending staff and resources if they try to be all things to all community sectors.

For example, public broadcasting’s Ready to Learn service already transmits a wide-ranging array of television, online and print matter enhancing school-readiness. Partnerships with Head Start, Even Start, First Book, libraries and even hospitals or pediatricians (many of which already exist through Ready to Learn) can apply economies of scale to supporting that content. As one PBS executive put it, such alliances *take the broadcast "off the TV screen" and into the homes and classrooms of the community...extending the learning provided on air and online through the face-to-face interactions among station outreach staff and local parents/child care providers/public school teachers.*

Community partnerships can do much more, however, than supplement national content. They have powerful potential to generate cost-effective original content, across platforms.

The director of online services for one licensee proposed that *even though many stations have moments when they engage the community, the risk is in having a true dialog with our audiences... we have to better understand kids and parents... but it makes sense from a financial perspective because we are not developing all of the content.*

Another panelist, an online content developer, strengthened that proposition: *It feels risky...but in the long run I think it turns out to be low risk, because it's what users want. I especially agree that stations have a real opportunity to develop local educational services that are unique to the medium by engaging their communities as content creators, and that this can make services that seemed beyond the resources of those stations possible. I feel this can be a key advantage for the PBS system, particularly against other educational providers (to the extent they are viewed as competitors), given the real presence member stations have in their communities, and I think this differentiation is going to become increasingly important.*

Some licensees already use partnerships to enhance local children's television services. WTIU/Bloomington, IN features daily "Kids Club Adventures" and a weekly "Friday Zone," a half-hour of local presentation wrapped around an episode from a national series. Partnerships with community organizations are integral to the effort. "Snack Zone" is presented with the Indiana Nutrition Council. Collaboration with the local newspaper and science museum makes possible a special weekly page for children, featuring an experiment that will be done on air. Partner organizations serve on a "Friday Zone" advisory board.

An April 4, 2002, article in the New York Times (*Interactive TV Arrives, Sort Of*) hinted that enhanced local content will be invaluable in building public demand for digital television. The article describes popular interactive services offered by Insight, the nation's ninth largest cable operator: *Its LocalSource application includes information on traffic conditions and local band performances. "You could look at this and think this is gritty, stupid little stuff," said Josh Bernoff, an analyst at Forrester Research. "When they say people love this, they are not just making it up."* One can easily imagine much richer 'LocalSource' education and community services, provided through the auspices and alliances of public broadcasters.

Community-generated digital applications – online dialogues moderated by civic partners, peer-to-peer exchanges, wireless delivery of information – may open the door to older children that public service media has found difficult to attract, and serve as a test-bed for on-air models.

Partnerships should provide access to new technological, promotional and/or financial resources.

As detailed in another section of this report, public broadcasting lacks the clout to move technology markets alone. Partnerships with hardware and software companies present the best opportunities for embedding public broadcasting brands and content in emerging platforms.

The history of television, computers and the Internet all reveal a consistent pattern: parents are early targets of new technology marketing. Appeals cite the potential benefits children will receive from promised content. In a crowded and rapidly-evolving digital marketplace, public service media should have appeal to a wide range of suitors in home- and school-based applications, since its trusted reputation and deep substance will denote a seriousness of purpose.

Public broadcasting already has profited from technical partnerships and collaborations. The online producer for two PBS Kids series cited a range of alliances, and what they have meant:

These have translated as benefits to the system as a whole both in terms of promotion (e.g., with Apple) or with access technology (with Macromedia and the National Center for Accessible Media). Microsoft's Actimate 2-3 years of funding allowed us to build and run what turned out to be the most-trafficked site at PBS, the Arthur web site. The most obvious success for me in terms of web traffic is the PBS/AOL relationship, which brings a steady stream of traffic to ZOOM's web site: no other referring relationship has come close.

Especially for smaller licensees, community-building technologies may be promising, but hardware acquisition and software development costs may make them prohibitive. In some instances, PBS can act as a cooperative broker or partnership builder, leveraging collective buying power and building turnkey applications. Alternatively, it can develop demonstration projects where emerging companies make equipment affordable in exchange for national exposure and trial.

A research strategist at one licensee expressed appreciation for past efforts along these lines: *I would like to see PBS work more as a broker for stations in terms of partnerships with technology firms and other service providers. I was very pleased with the efforts to provide e-mail solutions to stations and the discussion board project is also a great project.*

Partnership should use existing structures – especially locally – rather than building new bureaucracies.

Throughout this research, we have solicited opinions as to the most important strategic partners for public service media to engage in reaching children and families. While a wide variety of specific recommendations emerged, there are two common bonds. All are:

- Established institutions with already-strong community presence, so new bureaucracies needn't be invented.
- Places where children, parents or caregivers gather regularly, so that connections fit people's existing behavior, rather than asking them to change.

Not surprisingly, the two most frequently mentioned community partners were libraries and schools. Reasoning went beyond the obvious connections to literacy and education.

At libraries, both children's and general audience programs, web sites and outreach projects can be promoted. Whereas other partners may specialize in one area – say, science learning or the arts – the general nature of the library is suited to almost any public service media theme.

Many schools already use public broadcasting services; most are supportive of its home-use programming and online content, particularly for its non-commercial nature. Broadband internet connections are reaching schools at a rapid rate (well beyond their penetration into homes), enabling next-generation services like on-demand delivery of customized digital packages of video and data.

Further, with strong evidence for the importance of parental involvement in children's education, public service community media networks have a window for introducing multi-platform (voice mail, e-mail, web-based, streaming video) services to keep busy parents informed and engaged. This finding, from the digest of an online discussion coordinated by the Benton Foundation's "Connect for Kids" project, confirms the opportunity: *...a project manager at the Harvard Family Research Project...suggested that educators should educate themselves on the ways that parents are already involved. "In our research...we found that low-income working mothers were often unable to attend school events, but while at their workplaces they would call their children at home to remind them to do homework, or would even bring their children to work to use the computer or learn something new."*

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the US has 2.5 million children (Grades K-8) in before- and after-school programs, through schools or neighborhood clubs. One might suspect that many parents send children to these programs specifically so they won't be home watching television. Still, a multi-platform resource designed for meaningful interactivity and community-building – developed in concert with these existing sites (e.g., schools, Boys and Girls Clubs, Scouts, and the YMCA/YWCA) – could help public broadcasting extend its service to hard-to-reach 6-8 and 9-11-year-olds. There are two interesting models to study:

- In the United Kingdom, where there is strong enrollment in afternoon special-interest 'clubs' that meet at schools, the BBC is building its new digital television channel for youth with strong ties to these clubs. Three daily magazine shows will include televised reports from them, and the BBC will build interactive spaces for exchange, organized around the clubs.
- Researcher Karen Orr Vered of Flinders University, describes Australia's 'out of school hours care' programs as that country's *fastest growing segment of the childcare industry; the number of services has more than quadrupled since 1989*. The programs, usually located on school grounds, are broadly accepting of media use and play: *Most services have television, video players, video game machines of different types including the personal technology of the Game Boy, radios and CD players, and many have computers and software*. Australian media researchers see these programs as a fertile ground for studying children's media uses and preferences.

For-profit organizations may also be effective promotion partners for public broadcasting. Family restaurants or stores that attract both children and parents – such as Gap or Target – might be asked to disseminate program materials or promotional items. A community's major employers might provide outreach packages to employees as a 'family friendly' benefit. This might be explored as a revenue source -- corporate memberships in family learning clubs.

Partnerships should be sustainable over time.

System professionals expressed concern that, too often, tactical alliances have been made for short-term projects, based on one special program or transitory project. Effective relationships take time and effort to build. 'Serial monogamy' puts undue stress on local staff.

The Advertising and Promotion manager at one licensee, who also directs a locally-branded children's service, stated: *Many times a partnership has been set up with a national organization and we receive instructions that they are eager to work with us and to contact local offices, but when we do they are uninformed and not particularly helpful. Also, many times a cross promotion will be in place with a children's program and we don't find out about it until it's already being executed.*

More important, while short-term efforts may build awareness, long-term alliances should build membership. Families that engage in activities connecting community groups with public service media are more likely to see the additional value of becoming a station member. Special benefits may even include access to services from the partner organization.

Short-term projects may even subvert the goal of building memberships, if the partners end up feeling 'used.' As one station professional put it, *it's disheartening to many community groups when a station comes around with great enthusiasm for a "pick the ethnic group of your choice" screening that turns into just a way to promote an upcoming documentary.*

Partnerships should include a mechanism for listening to the target audience, in order to review and refine the partnership at the national and local level.

Public service media enjoys multiple measures of success. Some are quantitative (ratings, carriage, web site hits, classroom adoption of ancillary materials, mail or online submissions from children); others are more qualitative (positive reviews, 'playground buzz,' pop culture references). As the mix of these will vary from project to project, the measures to be applied for any particular effort are best established in advance, to fairly assess if an effort has met its goals.

Ongoing partnerships, similarly, need unique measures of success defined from the start, and a mechanism for ongoing evaluation and refinement that engages the end-user, the local managers within public service media and its partners, and the national coordinators.

Turnkey projects – like the Zoom local/national initiative – that enable licensees to give a community look and feel to national content across platforms – are a unique possibility for public broadcasting, and potentially a powerful draw for young people.

As a local licensee producer noted, *kids take notice when a show is local and when it reflects their community or experience. When they can expect to see a friend or a neighborhood they know, they are drawn to that program. Local programming and outreach, he added, can build social capital. The deeper the roots in the community, the better the programming. And the more our programming reflects the community and its diversity, the more it can deepen each station's relationship with its community.*

US public broadcasting is uniquely able to weave in local content. Because few US commercial broadcast stations are still locally owned or operated, most produce – at most – only their own newscasts. Market-specific children's programming has been all but dead since the 1970's, the victim of group ownership, the rise of cable children's channels, and restrictions on commercial content in local programming.

The capacity of public television licensees to produce local content varies widely. Few are capable of making and promoting sufficient full-length programs to attract and sustain a consistent audience. Further, it would be an ineffective use of resources for them to try to do so, when national programming franchises can apply economies of scale to building production and promotion plans that leave openings for local customization.

The turnkey, local-insert model pioneered by **Zoom** enables licensees to participate at whatever level is feasible. Some will produce frequent local inserts; others will make only the occasional item. Still others may be able to participate by adding local content to an online site, and others by customizing print materials to be distributed to schools or other community sites.

National content that probes – not simply reflects – American diversity

Public service media must examine, explore and reinforce cultural diversity. A cast of varied characters who interact and empathize is necessary, but not sufficient.

The earliest days of Federally-funded children's educational television were promising for promoting deep understanding of diversity. The Emergency School Aid Act (ESAA) of 1972 set aside 3 percent of its funds for production, promotion and distribution of *racially and ethnically integrated children's television programming with an educational mission. Between 1972 and 1979, the former Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) invested nearly \$68 million in the ESAA-TV effort, which yielded 31 series* (U.S. Congressional Office of Technology Assessment. *Teachers and Technology: Making the Connection*. OTA-EHR-616. Washington, D.C.: GPO, April 1995; <http://www.netc.org/cdrom/ota/html/ch6.htm>). The Act's provisions called for hiring people of color as producers, as well, to make the programming reflective of multi-cultural experiences in substance as well as appearance.

In the 1980's, however, when the Federal money dried up, there followed a time when it seemed that an adequate nod to human diversity was to build a 'one of each' cast: equal numbers of males and females always to include a Caucasian, an African-American, an Asian-American, and a Latino (and, often, one character with an apparent disability).

Certainly, it's important to portray a believably varied community; however, this outdated model facilitates stereotyping by requiring one character to stand for an entire race or ethnic group. Even with the customary overt efforts to counter stereotypes in each role, the lack of diverse models tended to leave a two-dimensional image.

The current generation of children already has a more nuanced appreciation for cultural diversity, and for good reasons:

- Today's youth may be the first generation to see racial minorities become a cumulative majority of the United States' population.

- Social opportunities across racial or ethnic lines are commonplace. In a poll conducted by Children Now, over three-quarters of all children answered “yes” to the question “are *any of your best friends* of different races.” The response was consistent across White children (80%), Latinos (80%), Asian-Americans (85%) and African Americans (74%).
- With increasing online access to worlds beyond their own communities, today’s youth are exposed earlier and more often to people from different backgrounds and circumstances.
- In virtual worlds, first impressions are more likely to be built on substance than appearance, opening the door to exploring respective cultures. In a 1996 paper *Thorough Americans: Minorities and the New Media* (<http://www.benton.org/policy/schement/minorities>), Jorge Reine Schement wrote ...*unlike skin color, cultures have porous boundaries, which allow for sharing and borrowing – America’s great asset.*

Schement went on to say that a great challenge is *to embrace the information society through the windows of these expanding and arriving cultures that are reinterpreting America.*

Similarly, Hugh Price, National Urban League President and a former public TV leader, said in a Corporation for Public Broadcasting paper on diversity, *we need a deeper recognition, a deeper level of storytelling, and a deeper respect and understanding of the richness of the traditions and backgrounds the represent who we really are now, not who we once were... We need to address the new face of America in a very direct frontal approach, not a subtle theme of all endeavors.*

These are entirely appropriate roles for public broadcasting, and have been recognized as such from the beginning. The Carnegie Commission on Educational Television wrote, ...*commercial television is obliged for the most part to search for the uniformities within the general public, and so to apply its skills to satisfy the uniformities it has found. Somehow, we must seek out the diversities as well, and meet them, too, with the full body of skills necessary for their satisfaction.*

Our panelists brought this challenge up to date. An educational psychologist specializing in media said ...*commercial media seeks the atomization or balkanization of the population; public service media can bring people into the group – not by homogenizing, but by seeking what is different and the same.*

This is essentially a restatement of PBS’ commitment to build bridging social capital, to using its media and community partnership capacities to facilitate exploration of the cultures that make us unique in the service of the causes that we share. Schement, in the above-referenced paper, went on to say, *If the 21st Century brings with it communication networks that are active in linking the members but deficient in connecting one network with another, then national discourse will suffer to everyone’s peril. [The challenge is] to link the networks so that one may hear and be heard beyond the comfort of one’s affinities.*

Currently, PBS Kids is heavily weighted toward animated fiction. It will be difficult to present themes of cultural diversity with sufficient depth and context that children can relate them to their own lives, without additional live-action and non-fiction content.

One expert on child development asserted, *If public broadcasting is going to effectively serve the country as a bona fide educational institution, it has to model every kind of American in its programming. The message that everyone not only has something to learn, but something to teach has got to be conveyed by giving everyone an opportunity to see people who look/speak/eat/dress as they do living and working and learning from people who look/speak/eat/dress differently.*

The importance of seeing mass media portray others like oneself has been known for a long time. Research in the early 1970s proposed that the inclusion or exclusion of a race or ethnic group or the context in which it is shown, has powerful impact on broad societal perceptions of that group.

Focus group research by Children Now, prepared for its 1998 conference on children's reading of race and class in media, confirmed that young people keenly feel the presence, absence or distortion of people similar to them. 80% of children of color, and two-thirds of white children, agreed that it is important to see children of their own race on TV. Their reasoning indicated that presence tells children that their race is important and included, and offers role models. Absence, predictably, suggested to them that their race or culture is deemed unimportant.

These young people further called for more programming about real young people in realistic situations. Certainly, animated stories with diverse characterizations can contribute to appreciation for cultural diversity. Consider, however, the advice cited in a preceding section on applications of interactive technology: *...the worst...involve substituting electronics for experiences that are better in the real world.*

In a presentation to a recent conference in Australia, the BBC's Controller of children's programs described his commitment to the full range of genres and content. *As a public service broadcaster, it is CBBC's job to invest in original programmes across all the genres that reflect our audience's lives and interests.* Currently, for its service on the two mainstream TV channels, CBBC is producing five hours of drama, 16 hours of entertainment, ten hours of factual and news, over an hour of animation and more than three hours of pre-school programming – every month. It has commissioned 1000 hours of original content for its two new digital channels.

Trying to build a multi-dimensional image of America's national, regional and local multi-cultural society without using non-fiction, live action genres is decidedly shortchanging experiences that are *better in the real world*. Digital media will be an especially important component in constructing this collage, as they can enable young users to respond to and amplify the stories put forward by PBS.

Achieving genuine diversity of perspectives and voices demands that PBS Kids seek opportunities to engage a broader range of American producers.

In its May 2001 strategic report on the changing environment for public service media, the European Broadcasting Union Digital Strategy Group put forward this challenge: *...the role of public service broadcasting continues to be as a service for the citizen, a stabilising and encouraging factor for the local content industry, and a yardstick for quality in the larger open market for multimedia content.*

Bowing to savings offered by government incentives, more than 30% of the PBS Kids schedule is now produced by or in substantial cooperation with Canadian companies. Worldwide (not just for the US), international co-productions or pre-sales are increasingly important to the bottom line of a project; however, compromises necessary for a program to be accessible in multiple countries, or to qualify for Canadian subsidies, are likely to diminish uniquely American content.

(Much of the world is concerned about growing dominance of American TV, film and music, but the battle seems less about truly American stories, and more about financial domination and displacement of other peoples' traditions gained by producing culturally homogenous media.)

Equally concerning, financial realities of development, production, marketing and outreach make it nearly impossible for smaller independent producers to launch national series. Opportunities tend to flow to well-established companies with existing resources to offer economies of scale. (One independent producer who reviewed the *All America's Kids* RFP noted that the demands of the proposal – let alone the series – were beyond most small companies' capacity.)

Independents are compelled to ally themselves with bigger companies. There is the danger that, in doing so, they cede some control of the unique voice that made their work distinctive.

That said, PBS Kids' competitors already are seeking diverse storytellers. An April 4, 2002, article in the Chicago Tribune (*Casting a Wider Net to Speak to Young Viewers*) featured Nickelodeon's efforts to embrace children's acceptance of diversity, saying *Nickelodeon is diverse not only in cast, but also in terms of nurturing talent behind the camera. The company has an internship program for minority writers that pays them a salary they can live on.* The story continued, discussing Nickelodeon's commitment to color-blind casting or incorporating a character's race or ethnicity into stories: *Hiring new talent often involves risk, but [Nickelodeon President of Film and Television Albie] Hecht says that so far, the gambles have paid off.*

By birthright and mission, public service media should be the leader in presenting the broadest range of deeply rooted authentic cultural content. There are venues in the PBS prime time schedule for doing so, and children expect and deserve no less.

While complete and extensive multi-platform works, produced from within distinctive cultures would be the ideal, any inroads toward fostering content from unique perspectives or experiences – interstitial items (like those commissioned by the Independent Television Service in the mid-1990's) or online-only content – would be a starting point.

A global window for a generation with few borders

Post-September 11 research for PBS by its advertising agency stated it clearly: *Globalism is now a forced perspective.* Yet, almost no US television programming explores or contrasts how young people live elsewhere in the world. Public service media can distinguish itself by creating regular and ongoing on-air and online vehicles for presenting world cultures. A focus on world youth and popular cultures, in particular, could be an attractive means for extending the age range of PBS audiences.

Asked about the most important skills for the 21st Century learner, our panel of educators unanimously cited the ability to navigate in the “global village.”

In many aspects of their lives, young people fluently bridge geographic or cultural borders. An American youth may play an online game with a child in Brazil, while watching Japanese *anime* on television and listening to British pop-star Sting in a duet with Algerian Cheb Mami.

Even conventional wisdom about younger American children rejecting media with foreign jargon or accents died in November 2001, when millions of children were spellbound by the authentic British voices in *Harry Potter*. Few if any missed the joke when one character referred to “bogeys,” rather than the American “boogers.”

Yet, with few exceptions (*Nick News* for home viewing, *Channel One* and *CNN Newsroom* for schools), US television fails to explore or contrast how young people live elsewhere in the world.

Again, from his conference presentation, the BBC children’s programming head noted that *for generations of British kids, Blue Peter’s reports from overseas have provided a window on the world helping them define their own impressions of other countries and cultures. Today, Blue Peter carries more foreign reports than ever before. Reflecting the global community is a key part of our responsibilities. New technologies enabling children to communicate across continents simply by clicking a mouse makes CBBC’s global mission a lot easier to implement...*

There is a strategic opening for PBS to reach older viewers by using pop culture as the ‘hook’ for programming with a global view, that reveals to young people how they are part of a large and diverse world of people, ideas and practices. This may be an effort that could be accomplished in cooperation with public service media providers in other countries – sharing footage or reports, building an online network, or facilitating an international ‘webquest.’

PBS should develop a context for occasional features from, or links to, other countries’ outstanding or innovative children’s media. Beyond its entertainment value, this can be packaged as a media literacy exercise, as media choices provide remarkable insight into a nation’s view of children’s growth, learning and fun.

In addition to commissioning US-produced perspectives on international topics, public broadcasting can broaden children’s worldview by presenting a taste of other countries’ children’s or youth media. Commercial TV networks have profited from specials featuring *The World’s Best Commercials*. Remaining true to its mission, public broadcasting could appeal to much the same curiosity with occasional tastes of *The World’s Best Children’s Programming*.

Often, when young people from different countries meet online, they negotiate to find areas of cultural overlap. *What music do you listen to* and *what TV do you watch* are among their first parries in seeking common experiences, and finding differences can be as interesting as finding similarities. PBS could broker this kind of exploration, through television and online presentations of children’s media from across the globe.

Because a nation's media output is an important and revealing reflection of its perspective on children and childhood, thoughtful accompanying materials would make these efforts not only entertaining, but a valuable media literacy exercise for use in schools.

Rights for public broadcasting to air or excerpt single programs, or an episode from a limited series, would likely be inexpensive. After a recent New York screening of children's programming from around the world, organized by the American Center for Children and Media, a representative from *Zoom* expressed interest in exploring ways to package international content for US audiences.

As broadband access grows, it will be possible for PBSKids.org to stream short segments that are revealing and entertaining. Mutual Internet links with other public service telecasters would permit young people to delve further.

As one aspect, PBS should revitalize its participation with the European Broadcasting Union, and take part in its international program exchanges. This is an inexpensive means for acquiring content that provides a window into other world cultures.

As an Associate Member of the European Broadcasting Union (through the Corporation for Public Broadcasting), US public broadcasting is eligible to participate in the EBU's Youth Programme Experts Group. First and foremost, the EBU working group meetings are an invaluable venue for informal program and idea exchange, as well as co-production development. PBS Kids' executives would benefit from the experience and expertise of these leaders, and vice versa.

In addition, PBS could join in the ongoing EBU "program exchanges," a cost-effective system for acquiring programs that reflect different cultures but are accessible and engaging to children everywhere.

The EBU operates three exchanges – one each for dramas and documentaries, and the "item" exchange (for short pieces to be used as interstitials or in magazine series). Each country produces one 15-minute drama and/or documentary (documentaries are given a unique theme annually), or five items, receiving in exchange all the other countries' productions. There are rules to ensure that the productions can travel across borders and cultures, and an executive producer to assure overall quality. There is no requirement to broadcast any of the resulting programs; most participants end up using about 10 of the 12-15 made each year.

For PBS to participate, it would have to fund a member station or independent producer to make the US contribution, as well as develop a framework for packaging the diverse films. For the item exchange, the Independent Television Service might be the ideal partner, engaging five different producers (see the above section on employing diverse voices) to make the short pieces, and distributing the full package (nearly 100 items) to stations for use between programs.

Digital media offer opportunities to facilitate exploration by older children across borders and cultures. Many elements of video gaming don't rely on language. With thoughtful content in keeping with its mission – perhaps in partnership with other public service media outlets – PBS Kids could become a testbed for new methods of culture exchange.

Television is international by choice and financial necessity; the Internet is global by nature.

When television programming goes global, more often than not it is forced into compromises that detract from its cultural expression. Animation works best because it can be voiced in any language. Violence sells because it doesn't require dialogue. Street signs, public telephones and mailboxes are left out of street scenes, since they vary from country to country. Some animated stories have gone so far as to have cars drive down the center of the road, so as not to favor either left-side or right-side countries.

When interactive media go global, they often use their digital facility to innovate means of communication across geographic, linguistic or cultural borders. Passportkids.com, a site launched by Sesame Workshop and Intel, made it possible for children around the world to build self-descriptions, using pre-selected content. While this made the site safe for young people, it also enabled the producers to provide grammatically-correct translations of the site content in over a dozen languages. A child in Japan could read, in Kanji characters, the profile created by an American with similar (or different) attributes and opinions.

Other forms of digital media create universal appeal by bypassing language all together. At a University of Chicago conference on video games and cultural policy, a noted game designer said, *to engage in a game is to engage in a series of communicative acts – you may not even speak the same language verbally, but you do speak a game language.*

Text messaging youth have developed their own shorthand language, suited to the limitations of the technology. While these wireless devices are primarily a local or national medium, the next generation of wireless devices may well be powerful and flexible enough to gain broader adoption.

As it seeks to attract older youth, PBS might explore partnerships with other public service media outlets around the world to exploit online digital interactive media for cultural exchange. The interface may be a game, the construction of a virtual environment, an arts exchange, or a model for globalized chat; the goal should be to build sustained and substantial exchange, leading to mutual respect, appreciation and understanding.

AMPLIFICATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS: SECTION 5:

Public service media take creative, content and programming risks.

For PBS Kids, this means:

Public broadcasting is accountable to the public, and not to shareholders or investors. This affords it the unique opportunity – some would say obligation – to defy common wisdom and experiment with the boundaries of technology and content, so long as the goal is better to fulfill its mission.

Risk-taking may entail presentation of ‘challenging’ topics or themes, innovation in format or genre, development of timely or culturally-bound content with limited shelf life or return on investment, and appeal to a narrow but highly engaged audience.

Recommendations

1. PBS Kids needs greater genre diversity. It is impossible to imagine the National Program Service for adults without live action drama, without news or current affairs, without examination of American, world and popular cultures. Yet, these are major gaps in the PBS Kids lineup.
2. For the youngest children, public service media should be a ‘safe haven.’ This is generally interpreted to mean a place where parents can leave their children unattended, in the knowledge that they’ll see beneficial offerings without exposure to inappropriate violence, sex, coarse content or language, and commercialism.

For elementary and older youth, however, only public service media – responsible to citizens rather than shareholders – is likely to take on challenging themes or ideas.

Doing so demands viewers’ and families’ trust. Public service media must ensure that parents, teachers and caregivers respect it as being thorough, thoughtful and fair. They must have confidence that public broadcasting’s service to children is appropriate and trustworthy, but not trivial.

Analysis

In her February 18, 2002, presentation to the Programmers’ Meeting, PBS President Pat Mitchell said ... *while I understand that limited resources and challenging times tend to make all of us more risk averse... we are the very ones and these are the very times in which we have to act more quickly and decisively, to take risks... to believe in and support the option for success.*

From the beginning, public service media's mission and unique purpose has been to take chances, whether with content, format, or the voices and views brought to air. The Carnegie Commission on Educational Television wrote, *...public television will have both the freedom and the facilities to experiment, to innovate, to range over the whole spectrum of human interests. For public television, such an approach to programming will be neither exceptional nor special, but its norm.*

Throughout this project, however, panelists have questioned whether US public broadcasting is living up to that directive. One system General Manager wrote,

We are not in the business of delivering eyeballs to advertisers. Because of that fact, we are supposed to be free to be cutting edge, to be daring and to be educational. Those were the qualities we could afford to pursue because we were non-commercial. And public broadcasting in its early days was all of those things.

We were the HBO before cable. We were the place where the very creative and daring could go to get their works produced and aired...But today our distinction is slipping...we have let much of our daring and creative leadership go to others places on the dial.

Today, the most “daring and creative leadership” in the children’s arena appears to reside with the Nickelodeon/Sesame Workshop joint venture, Noggin. Noggin’s mission and strategies must be a bright red flag for public broadcasting: the channel has appropriated the very terms – “non-commercial” and “educational” – once reserved for public service media. At the 2001 PBS Annual Meeting, 80% of public television professionals who took a “So You Think You Know Kids’ Media” quiz identified Noggin’s mission statement as being that of PBS Kids.

Noggin is re-purposing PBS’ flagship series – **Sesame Street** – on air, and recently sent out a live ‘road show’ of **Play With Me Sesame**. This spring, Noggin will air the sequel to the last live action drama series to bring a tween audience to PBS – **DeGrassi: The Next Generation**.

With small (but growing) digital cable distribution, Noggin is pioneering inexpensive production formats. **A Walk in Your Shoes** enables teens to try on someone else’s life (the most recent episode placed a Christian girl with a Muslim teen, post September 11). **On the Team** tapped an emerging genre with growing international appeal, the docu-soap, following a Brooklyn coed Little League baseball team. **Me In a Box** produced interstitial segments around children’s shoebox dioramas built to convey the most important aspects of their lives; an online component encouraged young people to build their own “me in a box.”

There is no more important time for public broadcasting to reclaim the mantle of risk-taker. Even in prosperous times, digital media seemed on a track toward quick-gratification, ready-profit applications – shopping, gambling, pornography. Now, Internet exploration has retrenched and risk capital is scarce; many of the most innovative independent web sites for young people have gone under. Public service media may represent the best hope for the vast beneficial potential of digital media.

In addition (and pending a Supreme Court challenge), the Federal Appeals Court ruling striking down the television ownership cap could spark further rounds of media consolidation. The FCC's recent votes deregulating broadband Internet access via cable and conventional phone lines may facilitate roadblocks to independent content online.

Ultimately, one has to suspect that a small number of cross-media conglomerates will own all the commercial broadcast and cable networks, as well as digital media access points and major content portals. With internal production studios feeding their comprehensive and integrated distribution pathways, the effect will be to diminish the diversity of voices on television and online. Public service media must provide the alternative – challenging and diverse voices addressing themes and producing genres that aren't necessarily commercially viable.

Amplification of Recommendations

PBS Kids needs greater genre diversity. It is impossible to imagine the National Program Service for adults without live action drama, without news or current affairs, without examination of American, world and popular cultures. Yet, these are major gaps in the PBS Kids lineup.

In fall 2001, PBSKids produced a chart detailing the different areas covered by its ongoing series. 58% of the series were classified as “Social/Emotional,” and another 14% include Social/Emotional development as one of multiple curricula.

“Social/Emotional” is the same vague educational rationale ascribed to nearly all of commercial broadcasters' programs made to meet the FCC mandate.

Public broadcasting appears to be shying away from what one panelist in our London meetings called ‘hard fun’ – deeply educational, curriculum-based content, though presented in engaging and innovative ways.

More important than what is on the list, however, is what is missing. No PBS Kids programming covers timely issues – news or current events. No programming deals explicitly with the diversity of cultures in America (though **Zoom** does so implicitly). No programming exposes children to their place in the larger world. There is no live action drama.

It is impossible to imagine PBS – or any public service broadcaster – accepting such voids in its adult offerings. Children need and deserve the same range of programming that adults expect.

In panels and interviews, three definitions emerged for risk-taking content that is now in short supply:

- ‘ephemeral’ ideas, such as live, timely and culture-specific presentations;
- highly-focused material that may resonate deeply with a limited audience; and
- offerings with low merchandising potential.

Ephemeral programs – Increasingly, commercial media are unwilling to take on the financial risk of content with little shelf life or international sales potential.

At present, the only ongoing US news programs for young people are **Nick News** and **Channel One**. PBS's closest public service counterparts have interpreted and explained news to children, daily, for decades – via **Newsround** on the BBC/UK and **Logo** on ZDF/Germany.

Keeping young people informed and engaged in the world around them is a vital role for public service media. Equally important, however, there is immeasurable benefit to having in place during emerging events a team that is deeply rooted in how to present news to children. PBS made a wise decision to offer a safe haven from live coverage of the attacks on September 11; however, the lack of any ongoing reportage or mediation for young people (on commercial or public media) clarifies the need for a youth news franchise – on air or online.

Culture-specific content might also be considered ephemeral, and is considered in greater depth in the section on public service media as a community hub.

Lastly, in a distributed media environment, digital content created by young people themselves often fits this description. To capture their attention and engagement, it must be timely, interactive, flexible and to some degree spontaneous. This is risky because, as one technology panelist put it, *most people making media still don't understand what participation is. They think it's giving kids some 'choice.'* Actually, *it's giving kids the ball. Children will take part in narratives they can write, or co-write, themselves.*

Simulations of youth control are common in commercial media – help choose today's episode, post a comment, take a poll, and so on.

To relinquish any degree of actual control over content or presentation, however, is rare and – for good reason – not something any media outlet takes lightly. **Zoom**'s Web Site, and some of the creative engines on noggin.com, are the closest existing models (because of production lag time, **Zoom**, the television program, is more of a simulation of audience participation).

One public broadcasting online producer suggested that *while there is some truly excellent, mission-driven web programming at PBSKids.org, accessible for low-bandwidth audiences, there's little raising the bar to bring/keep older kids or kids with reasonable expectations of the typical media-richness (audio/animation/connectivity etc.)...*

Privacy rules, the cost of moderation and monitoring, and respect for safe ways to empower young people limit current possibilities. But, by their educational mission and commitment to audience engagement, public service media are better poised than their commercial counterparts to exploit emerging opportunities to allow young people to contribute to, build and re-purpose media. Perhaps it will be a means to invent or add to a game instead of just playing it. Maybe it will be a digital editor with which they can 'grab' resources from the public broadcaster, then create and share their own 'mix.' Or, perhaps it will be a forum where young people can instantly add personal, local or cultural perspective to national or international stories.

As a PBS executive stated in discussing these possibilities, *establishing public media as a creative lab for kids to be a part of -- vs. a passive participant in -- the media process would be compelling*. Perhaps even more important, these participatory possibilities may be a key to drawing teens to public broadcasting.

Highly-focused content -- Commercial services – in the business of sustaining mass audiences to sell to advertisers – can't take the chance of segmenting a demographic group already fragmented by multiple channels and multiple media. For public service media, however, programming with lasting impact for particular viewers falls squarely within the mission.

Developmentally-appropriate children's educational television meets this description, because it must be tightly age- or curriculum-targeted. In some respects, this is not such a risk: PBS Kids' ratings success among 2 to 5-year-olds pre-school demonstrates that it is possible to do well with well-aimed material.

Moreover, as these children grow older and able to navigate alone in a multi-platform, 'pull-media' world, they may grow impatient with broad audience TV. Increasingly, young people are likely to turn to digital technologies that enable them to seek out and select material of specific interest to them.

New digital cataloging and retrieval technologies offer the opportunity for individuals or groups to access materials that meet their unique needs, abilities and interests. This is covered in depth in the section on education as the driving force in all decisions, regarding metadata tagging.

The BBC will exploit this concept within its just-launched digital children's channels. Through alliances with after-school clubs around the UK, CBBC (the new channel for older children) will provide daily, timely on-air reports on the clubs' unique themes. Young people, then, will be able to go online to join a community of people with shared interests.

Speaking only to some children is a risk for commercial services because the rest may go to another channel, another screen, or simply outside to play. Traditionally, however, public broadcasting has not only been willing to take that chance, it has welcomed it.

On air and online, series like **Sesame Street**, **Mister Rogers Neighborhood**, **Barney**, and **Zoom** have offered ideas to take away for later. The best public children's content doesn't simply wash over the viewer or user; it provides inspiration for activities beyond the set. The immediate inspiration is enhanced further by community outreach and educational partnerships like Ready to Learn.

To quote Fred Rogers, *TV may be the only electrical appliance that's more useful after it's turned off*. And, further, to quote a 1970 article by George E. Bair, then Director of Educational Television at the University of North Carolina, *it is simply not true...that public television is the program which appears on the screen. Public television ought to be what happens because programs were put on the screen*.

Programs with low merchandising potential -- This point follows rather naturally those before it: short-lived, limited-audience, potentially-controversial content seldom lends itself to plush toys or pillowcases. The question of public broadcasting's merchandising its properties is considered in greater depth in the section on the non-commercial nature of public service media.

For the youngest children, public service media should be a 'safe haven.' This is generally interpreted to mean a place where parents can leave their children unattended, in the knowledge that they'll see beneficial offerings without exposure to inappropriate violence, sex, coarse content or language, and commercialism.

For elementary and older youth, however, only public service media – responsible to citizens rather than shareholders – is likely to take on challenging themes or ideas.

Doing so demands viewers' and families' trust. Public service media must ensure that parents, teachers and caregivers respect it as being thorough, thoughtful and fair. They must have confidence that public broadcasting's service to children is appropriate and trustworthy, but not trivial.

In the process of this research, some people said public broadcasting should be a 'safe haven,' a place where parents can feel comfortable leaving their children unattended. At least an equal number said public broadcasting must take on difficult or challenging themes and ideas such as race, class, sexuality, violence, disability and death, commercialism.

(‘Difficult’ content in the US might well be mainstream or even conservative elsewhere. For every one of these topics, the world's countries will line up along a continuum from “couldn't touch it” to “not a problem.” Perhaps, for the US, the best definition of challenging content would be topics that commercial media can't or won't approach.)

Safe or thought-provoking – each view, in its own way, reflects a strongly-felt need. Is it possible for one service to simultaneously be the most risk-taking and the most safe?

Certainly, for the youngest children, a safe and age-appropriate space is vital. On those rare occasions where it has taken on hard topics – for example, the death of Mr. Hooper on **Sesame Street** – parents have been reassured by clear communication from the producers and PBS that the treatment is carefully considered and well researched.

For public broadcasting to attract and engage older children, however, it will have to deal with these topics – which are integral to their lives in the 21st century – on a more constant basis.

A broadcaster must earn the right to offer such challenging material, through responsible and thoughtful service across its services to children. To the extent that PBS Kids offers a preponderance of facile social-learning stories, it will find it difficult to “push the envelope” when necessary.

Motherhood can be a slippery slope, wrote Sharon O'Neill Bertrand, in a March 10, 2002, *Chicago Tribune* commentary. *My idea of a good morning is having enough time to shave both legs or finding that the PBS fundraising drive is over so that uninterrupted cartoons are back.*

Bertrand's article was satire, to be certain, but her choice of words was revealing. Further, she is not alone.

A producer from within the system suggested that it's easy to say that PBS Kids doesn't/shouldn't aspire to be Cartoon Network or Nick but while it continues to fill blocks of air with cheaper animation, it's easy to compare...

A licensee General Manager wrote, today our distinction is slipping. We still hold an edge in quality children's programming, but we have let much of our daring and creative leadership go to others places on the dial... Public television is in danger of becoming a distinction without a difference, and we must address this issue now.

If parents come to expect nothing more from public broadcasting than mainstream, somewhat educational *cartoons*, they may feel their trust is violated if they come across more provocative content. If, however, public broadcasters regularly offer high-quality, carefully-considered news, magazines, documentary or topical drama, these will come to feel safe.

AMPLIFICATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS: SECTION 6:

Public service media employ multiple measures of success.

For PBS Kids, this means:

Whereas commercial media are ultimately held accountable to a bottom line of ratings and/or ancillary merchandise revenues, public service media has the luxury of multiple indicators of success, both quantitative and qualitative. It can view each offering as a multi-platform portfolio, with different expectations and purposes for every element. Further, it has the opportunity to assess its effectiveness with multiple audiences: children, parents, teachers and caregivers, system professionals and even others in children's media.

Even traditional commercial measures – user/audience size, composition, frequency and duration – have unique significance. These are quantitative emblems of public broadcasting's effectiveness in reading and responding to the public interest.

Recommendations

1. Every offering from PBS Kids deserves specially-tailored goals. Setting these multifaceted measures should be an essential part of the negotiation process for development, acquisition or acceptance of any work. Evaluation using these goals central to revision, renewal or rescheduling.
2. Working with member stations and community/national partners, PBS Kids should develop replicable systems for gathering quantitative and qualitative measures of success. These might include a combination of social capital indicators like participation in community partnerships or membership growth; educational benchmarks including adoption of materials by schools and caregivers; business measures like returns from related merchandise or continuation of strategic partnerships beyond the R&D phase; or signs of deep engagement such as time spent online or audience submissions.
3. Content quality is determined in part by impact on the target audience, but in part by subjective standards like creativity or innovation, effective and aesthetic use of production resources, and clarity. Independent peer review of consistency and quality would bring fresh eyes to these assessments; PBS Kids should consider a children's media advisory committee, involving producers from varied platforms (without current content on PBS), advocates, researchers, journalists, artists, authors, teachers and others.

Analysis

Public broadcasting can't choose its competitors. Its television and online offerings vie for children's time and attention with dedicated commercial channels, video games, feature films, music and more. In terms of engagement, story quality and production values, PBS has no choice but to match its rivals; young people don't make distinctions or allowances across brands.

But, in most respects, it is folly for US public broadcasting to chase identical measures of success as its commercial competitors. Questions of mission aside, these niche-audience outlets, operated by vertically-integrated corporations, are massively and constantly cross-promoted across multiple channels and platforms. Bolstered by advertising dollars, subscriber fees or both, most can openly exploit commercial tie-ins. Direct competition is an un-winnable game.

Without question, ratings are important for public broadcasting. To quote one PBS senior executive, *while one can argue (and I'm sure they will) that our measure of success should not focus so much on ratings, what difference will it make if quality content is available and no one can see it?* A business consultant familiar with public broadcasting rightly added that *other public broadcasters – those who are the predominant broadcasters in their countries – deal fundamentally in reach and share.*

Ultimately, no one we consulted did criticize public broadcasting for paying attention to audience measurements. Instead, they emphasized that ratings' significance for public service media is different from that for commercial channels, at least where children are concerned:

- Funders want to know that they've supported works that are reaching an eager audience, but PBS doesn't set advertising rates or offer "make goods" because of ratings ups and downs.
- For a service meant to fulfill the needs of a diverse democratic nation, cumulative audience and reach are more revealing than winning a time slot or boosting viewership during "sweeps."
- With the goals of engaging, educating and informing young people, time spent within PBSKids.org seems a more valuable measure than sheer volume of visits.

In short, public service media should both evaluate and promote its television and online ratings less as an indicator of competitive popularity, and more as a measure of how well it has ascertained and fulfilled public needs.

Two children's media experts, serving on panels for this work, expressed it best. One said:

It may be convenient to borrow language from marketing and discuss audience segmentation, identified niches and branding, but more instructive to use words that speak to the health of and continued development of a democracy. PBS need not expand its reach to an audience but must maintain its relevance among US citizens, broadly defined. I don't think these are mere semantic hang-ups.

The other added: *It's important to get away from the #1 in the ratings game, though the need to have an audience is important if you want corporate or government support. When people say 'nobody' watched a certain show, 'nobody' is either millions or hundreds of thousands of viewers – more than the audience for most books that get published.*

Over-reliance on commercial measures of success may suppress the very things discussed in this report as making public service media unique: educational content, serving diverse audiences, community development, risk-taking. The general manager of a competitor children's channel summed up the challenge: *Economic pressures have forced PBS to use the same measures as commercial media to make its decisions, and to do what has worked before instead of trying to break new ground. Public broadcasting has to decide what it's going to be and be that intensely.*

Reliance on commercial measures of success is not merely a consequence of a current or passing financial environment; it is rooted in the history of American media. In his keynote speech to the 2001 FirstView instructional programming screening, Benton Fellow and television writer/producer Richard Somerset-Ward reminded the audience that, *if there is one way in which I think we in public television have sinned – and sinned unforgivably – in the past 30-40 years, it is in our slavish conformity to the commercial model. It didn't happen in any other country, because everywhere else public television was invented and established before commercial television. In other words, public broadcasting had established standards to which the commercial folks had (to some extent) to conform. Here, it was the other way round.*

Fortunately, as outlined in the preceding sections, public service media can have a rich, multi-faceted story to tell in its own support, and using its own terms. As the above-cited children's media advocate also said, *the best measure of success would be a delicious and diverse list of things that public broadcasting has covered...to be able to say 'before this program, not enough people knew x, and now they do.'*

Amplification of Recommendations

Every offering from PBS Kids deserves specially-tailored goals. Setting these multifaceted measures should be an essential part of the negotiation process for development, acquisition or acceptance of any work, and evaluation using these goals central to renewal or rescheduling.

PBS series producers – and also UK independent producers – told us in panel discussions that they *know* programs fulfill different roles in a broadcaster's overall service:

- Some are commissioned to draw big audiences, while others are designed for deep impact on a more targeted group.
- Some content is designed to influence kid culture – to generate “playground buzz”; other content engages outreach or educational partnerships, speaking also to parents, caregivers or community leaders.

- Some ideas are meant to last and will be re-commissioned over and over, while others are short-lived or timely.
- At times, television content will be supported by the Internet; in other cases, a strong and active community online is the primary goal.
- Even a single franchise, may have different goals for unique audiences – while television viewing of **Zoom** falls off with age, older children continue to visit the series' Web site, often spending more time than they would have watching a televised episode.

What PBS Kids' producers did ask was that expectations and goals be agreed upon early in the development or acquisition of any project. This would empower the producers and presenters to concentrate their efforts and resources on those specific audiences or attributes on which their success would be evaluated.

PBS Kids has already begun this process with its draft "Criteria and Characteristics," outlining four levels of depth for various works. There are two next and necessary steps:

1. Complete this chart while clarifying that a single project may cut across levels in its various aspects (for example, a program that serves at one level for curriculum type may still be called on to deliver or a different level of outreach materials, if PBS and its educational or community advisors sense a need or opportunity); and
2. Develop a formal and coherent system for codifying this chart in negotiation and contracting.

When PBS Kids' various on-air and online franchises aren't competing for the same results, it may become more apparent that collaboration, or cross-promotion and marketing, can produce a winning result for all. At both the PBS Annual Meeting and the panel for PBS Kids' producers, there was a clear call for using PBS Kids' most popular characters together in brand promotion – for the individual series to collaborate, not compete, in marketing the overall PBS Kids' service.

The good news is that success breeds success; the bad news is if success only brings slavish imitation. This caution was offered by a competing commercial children's channel manager. She warned that much can be learned from initiatives that do well, but trying to replicate winning elements leads to regression to the mean – in content, format, or other more superficial features. Everything begins to look the same.

Working with member stations and community/national partners, PBS Kids should develop replicable systems for gathering quantitative and qualitative measures of success. These might include a combination of social capital indicators like participation in community partnerships or membership growth; educational benchmarks including adoption of materials by schools and caregivers; business measures like returns from related merchandise, or continuation of strategic partnerships beyond the R&D phase; or signs of deep engagement such as time spent online or audience submissions.

PBS executives, taking part in an internal online panel, discussed factors beyond ratings that can best be assessed at the local level. One noted that *stations capture very rich anecdotal information about the impact of the broadcasts and the station's community outreach activities. The challenge is in developing systems for quantifying this goldmine of data and in assisting stations to collect, and report, the right elements when attempting to measure their success.*

Within this data is the quantifiable case for the vitality and urgency of public service media: not only how many teachers, parents and children are using programs and their associated educational materials, but the degree to which children's awareness, aptitude, knowledge and active engagement have grown as a result.

This will be an important follow-up to the PBS/Markle project: to isolate what measures will be informative, supportive and distinctive for public broadcasting, and to create a viable system for harvesting necessary figures. Specific information to be analyzed, as suggested by our panel participants, falls into four areas.

Data to be gathered in cooperation with licensees

- *Local station membership is a strong measurement of public service media's perceived value in a market...a member may not consistently watch public broadcast media [yet] may still understand its contribution to the community;*
- *Engaging and encouraging viewers to get involved in their communities...could be [measured] by assessing pre- and post-year how activity levels in local markets have changed;*
- *Incorporating specific call to action messages on-air...would help to capture viewer involvement.*

Measures of educational adoption and effect

- *We should attempt to...measure the growing use by educators and parents of the educational outreach materials for PBS Kids' programs. Unfortunately, this is a very time-consuming and paper intensive process. But even samples of users would give us more than we have at this point.*
- *Public broadcasting has profited hugely from summative research on several of its signature series: **Sesame Street, Reading Rainbow, Barney**. The opportunity to review, to measure effectiveness, and to consider learning in context is of benefit not only to the franchise in question, but to educational use of media overall. *Where we're able to make a big difference is in curriculum design, and research in terms of impact. What we do then is replicable.**

Business Partnerships

- Content decisions must be separate from licensing and merchandising potential; however, for franchises that do have potential, marketplace sustainability must be watched constantly. Waning interest in stores may presage the end of the TV or online life cycle, as well.
- Financial return to public broadcasting's children's services is an important publicly-stated measure of marketing success, as one panelist explained. *I think the argument [for merchandising] has to be: we're providing socially redeeming value that the market can't or won't provide on its own...you can make the case even more strongly if whatever "profit" is generated is used to make the service even better...and/or is committed to developing better free service.*
- *For technology partnerships, perhaps a measure of success is continuation past the demonstration phase. We've spent a lot of time and energy in these partnerships, without being a sufficient part of the business when they go from prototype and demo to actual service.*

Deep Engagement

The "Current Media Environment" panel included substantial discussion about the true meaning of "interactivity," particularly regarding public service media's standards for its online and digital television applications. The core argument was that, *interactivity is a sustained set of interactions*, and that we currently have *an impoverished notion* of its meaning.

Interactivity has become the catch-all term for any action on the part of the viewer or user, from the simplest click-and-watch "Living Book" through chat and on to opportunities to capture repurpose and share digital content.

The panel recommended, therefore, that public service media not merely count physical acts of interaction, but build children's capacity to engage in *sustained, thoughtful discussion over more than two iterations*. Measures of success would be based on young people's *ability and discipline to listen and contemplate what has been heard*. (Note: *listen* and *heard* were used by the speaker to denote attentiveness to varied stimuli – audio, image or print.)

Content quality is determined in part by impact on the target audience, but in part by subjective standards like creativity or innovation, effective and aesthetic use of production resources, and clarity. Independent peer review of consistency and quality would bring fresh eyes to these assessments; PBS Kids should consider a children's media advisory committee, involving producers from varied platforms (without current content on PBS), advocates, researchers, journalists, artists, authors, teachers and others.

In discussing factors influencing digital conversion, the European Broadcasting Union's Digital Strategy Group (Media With a Progressive Purpose, Part II, Managing Digital Evolution, December 2001) noted that *public service broadcasters generally measure results by the quality of the programme output rather than profit or surplus*.

Program quality is multi-faceted and difficult to assess in a mass or even mass-customized media environment.

For one thing, quality is closely linked to the needs and interests of the viewer or user. If a program, web site, or other media content inspires positive action or new thinking in one child, it is of high quality for that individual. As is discussed in the section on “risk taking,” it’s important for public service media to have that kind of personal bond with its audiences – to offer content that may appeal more narrowly, but with lasting impact.

Quality does also exist in equally subjective measures involving production standards. Success in this aspect isn’t linked to budget, but to an understanding that young people deserve the same aesthetic respect and energy – in story, writing, design, direction, application of resources – as adults. This applies both to program content, and to the packaging or branding surrounding it.

When managing the day-to-day details of a multi-platform children’s media service, it can be difficult to step back and objectively consider the overall effect. The EBU Digital Strategies Group suggests that quality can be measured through *indirect means, such as benchmarking and peer review*. A senior public broadcasting official concurred, saying: *we need expert opinions on how well the curriculum is being presented*.

In this regard, it would be refreshing and productive for PBS Kids to engage a Children’s Media Advisory Group, to conduct periodic reviews of public broadcasting’s services. This group, drawn from the variety of professions related to children’s educational media, would review PBS Kids’ efforts from both a creative and a substantive perspective, as measured against both the service goals (addressed in the section on education) and the objectives for individual components (as addressed above).