

Brilliant on the Basics Newsletter

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A Project of
The Station Resource Group

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With a “late start” in fund raising (1994), WOI now applies the best techniques to accelerate results.

Whenever we try to generalize about public radio, we trip over “system diversity.” Public radio is not a set of repeater stations, all run in the same way by a central administration. Differences appear in every aspect of station operation and ownership.

One distinction among stations seems particularly important: namely, the level of institutional support. As a group, “Community licensees” have the most fund raising experience and the most sophisticated fund raising practices. They are motivated by *necessity*. Almost everything at the station — facilities, salaries, and most of the programming — is funded by audience-sensitive income.

The presence and availability of strong institutional support creates a very different fund raising environment, with different motivation and needs. This is the situation at Iowa State University, which runs WOI AM and FM, in Ames, Iowa. Here the level of institutional support has been and continues to be

impressive, with the ISU providing more than 40% of the stations’ budget. Because of the strong institutional support, membership is a relatively new form of income at WOI. On-air drives only started in 1994. Their renewal systems are only three or four years old.

Consequently, when WOI joined the BOB Project in 1997, their representatives — Carol Lamb and Don Wirth — expected to learn a lot from more experienced participants. And they were not disappointed. Each meeting provided dozens of proven, practical ideas worth stealing. Jim Lewis helped Carol Lamb sharpen WOI’s renewal mail. They changed their on-air pledge sound to stress larger gifts and installments. They expanded their “Buck-A-Day” club and, for the first time, asked for “additional gifts.” After 18 months in the project, Carol felt that BoB “has given me the time to do long-term planning. It’s given me the confidence to experiment with things that I had been thinking of trying. It’s changed the way we work.”

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An Interview with WOI Membership Director, Carol Lamb

MF: Let me begin with a simple question. From what I heard, you had a very good year in FY98. Is that true?

CL: We had a terrific year. Membership raised \$678,000, which was \$80,000 or \$90,000 over what we raised last year. Last year we had \$585,000.

You've told me that you "got a late start," so put that number in perspective for me... describe the history of membership fund raising at WOI.

We did start late. The first membership fund raising at WOI was done in May 1993. We went on the air for four days in May with a "Charter Membership Campaign." It was so low tech... we had people sitting anywhere we could to answer phones. We had our first seven-day drive in November 1993. Catherine Watkins was our Development Director at that time, and she did a great job of managing the drives. I was the office manager, so I wasn't directly involved, but I was here.

Why did WOI go so long without needing this kind of financial support?

Well, the answer is pretty simple: our University (Iowa State University) funds us very well. It used to fund us even better, and the previous adminis-

trations felt that they should support us--completely. That was the right thing to do. Recently, changing times have affected the amount of support the university can provide. Still, we get forty-one percent of our annual budget from the University, and we're reasonably certain that the administration will continue that support. But if we want to see the growth we need for continued success... that will have to come from our own fund raising efforts.

Does the state legislature designate specific funds for public broadcasting or is that a University-level decision?

The legislature provides money for the University, and the University decides how much to give the station. There are three state-funded University stations, KUNI at Cedar Falls, the stations in Iowa City [WSUI/KSUI], and our station at Iowa State. I don't know how funding is for the other universities. I know KUNI has been actively fund raising for a long time. But Iowa City has only started fund raising recently.

So, you've had such strong university support that the idea of individual giving to the radio station really wasn't required?

No... before we hired Catherine and formalized our program, we would have very mild-mannered messages about "The university supports us, but we could always use more help. Call and ask us how you can contribute." Only when Catherine arrived did we begin serious fund raising.

Looking back to last year, how would you explain the increase?

I would like to say that it was directly



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WOI Renewal Mail - New First Year Renewal Letter

Happy Anniversary!

Dear WOI Radio Member:

Nearly a year ago you did something great: you decided to become a member of WOI. Time flies when you're having a good time--and when you're listening to WOI Radio!

Your gift helped WOI provide you with the finest news, information, and music available on radio today. But it has been almost a year since your first membership gift. I am writing to ask you to renew your support at this time for another year of outstanding radio programs.

- Every day, WOI brings you the most objective, wide-ranging news programs available through *Morning Edition and All Things Considered*, augmented with news of importance to Iowa through Don Forsling's *Talk of Iowa* and *Midday* with Doug Cooper.
- Hosts Karen Bryan, Rachel Jeffrey's, and Jake Graves bring you the finest classical music performances in the world each day on *The Music Shop*.
- WOI provides jazz each evening with Curt Snook -- the only source for jazz in much of Iowa.
- As he has since 1964, Doug Brown assembles *The Book Club* each morning.
- And in a state where weather directly affects people's livelihoods, Elwynn Taylor gets it right as rain.

When you add it up, WOI gave you more than 8,000 hours worth of reasons to renew your support this year ... and to take pride in our accomplishments. After all, your contribution helped make it possible.

For all these reasons ... please take a moment to write out your renewal check. The enclosed reply form and mail/return envelope make it easy. As you renew, please consider increasing your investment for the coming year.

Our share of NPR programming now costs \$215,000 per year. We pay over \$65,000 each year for *Whad 'Ya Know?* with Michael Feldman, *Marketplace*, and other PRI programs. Moreover, the costs of our local service have increased as we have worked to improve it. And as our costs have increased, many other revenue sources have stayed the same or declined.

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

You are our most reliable source of revenue. We realize how important you are in keeping WOI a quality radio service that is commercial-free, and we want you to know how much we appreciate your past support.

Your prompt renewal assures you uninterrupted delivery of our quarterly newsletter, *Rhythm & News*, which provides behind-the-scenes looks at the people who work for you on WOI Radio.

Your contribution is also a vote for another year of *A Prairie Home Companion* with Garrison Keillor, more *Car Talk* with Tom and Ray Magliuzzi, more *Fresh Air* with Terry Gross ... hours of worthwhile radio from people who seem like old friends.

But most importantly, renewing your membership tells us that we can count on you to help us continue providing quality public radio throughout Iowa.

Thanks again for choosing to support WOI Radio. You've helped make WOI the best radio on radio. And here's to another great year!

Sincerely,

Carol Lamb

Carol Lamb
Membership Director

PS Your prompt renewal will save us the cost of additional reminders, insuring that your dollars go where they belong ... into programming on WOI. Thank you.

attributable to the brilliant efforts of the Membership Director, however there were other factors, including a very strong economy. You really can't underestimate the influence of the economy.

Having worked in Wisconsin for more than a decade, I saw how the overall economy can be quite strong while the farm economy is weak. Is that happening now in Iowa, and how does your station relate to the farmers? Is the farm economy a big part of your economic base?

The farm economy in Iowa is going down. I've heard some discussion on our station about how we might be heading toward another "farm crisis," like the one we saw in the 1980's. I certainly hope not. In Iowa, there is as much non-farm economy as farm economy. So we are not completely connected to the farm economy. But I believe that if we have a slow-down in the economy...in any part of the economy...we are going to see a downturn in our fund raising.

Do you have farm-oriented programming on the air?

Sure, our AM station, WOI-AM, has been on the air for eighty-five years, and we are one of the few stations offering market reports. If you lived in Wisconsin, you heard it: the highs and the lows and sow-bellies... I never have been able to figure out what a sowbelly is, but I guess the people who need to know do know.

Okay, so the economy was one factor in your success, what else?

We had two extremely successful on-air drives. We stressed higher membership levels and we really pitched installments. That was a big change, because you didn't hear about the basic pledge levels all that much.

What do you mean by "stressing higher membership levels"?

Well, just a few years ago, we would go on the air and say: "We appreciate a gift of any level. Our basic membership level is \$35--just send what you can." Then, our staff started saying, "We appreciate any level... how about considering \$5 or \$10 a month. Is it worth a dollar a day?" They stayed away from talking about the basic membership. But we would add that "we appreciate your support at any level."

When we started the "Buck-a-Day Bunch" in October '96 we had 21 people enroll. By the Spring of 1997, that was up to 75, so we're talking about substantial dollars. Some people send us a check for the whole amount, some pay in installments. And in addition, we always try to give our buck-a-day donors some small gift. The first year we did this, I bought some page-a-day calendars, and had the on-air staff write personal thank-yous on different dates. That got to be too much, so I bought a clock with the WOI logo on it and a second hand. That way, "every second of every day, you'll know you're supporting WOI."

Did you make any significant changes in your mailing program?

We made several changes. We started

sending the six-month check-up card and we added the fourth hit in the renewal series. Next month, we'll start the first-year renewal series with a "Happy Anniversary" letter, which is adapted from a letter Jim Lewis wrote. [See page three.]

Have you seen any clear response to your changes?

Not so far. We just sent the six-month postcard out [see below], and I haven't been able to track the impact yet. We started mailing the fourth hit renewal in January. My gut reaction to that change is: Yes, it is working, because we're making more money. But I won't have good evidence until we go through another Target Analysis.

You're seeing something that a lot of other BoB stations have been seeing: it's really hard to keep track of all this stuff. You try things, but it's hard to

find the time to do the analysis required to see if they're working.

That's right. I'm trying to set aside time to look at these trends, but... well... things have been interesting. So I don't always have the time to sit back and really study these things. I expect this to change some next year, with Don Wirth coming in as my supervisor and the restructuring our department has recently undergone.

Did you reduce or eliminate any activities that you found were unproductive?

Not many. We did stop offering so many little special premiums during our drives.

What do you mean?

Oh, tickets for dinner theatre, paperback books, five-dollar gift certificates for ethanol.

And what did you retain?

Gourmet dinners. There's a place that



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Address Service Requested

New Member Six Month Checkup

IT'S TIME FOR YOUR 6-MONTH CHECKUP!

You have a 6-month dental exam: why not a 6-month membership exam?
If you answer NO to any of these questions, Please call us right away: 1/800-861-8000!

- Is your name in our records the way you want it (check your mailing label)?
- Do we have your correct address?
- Are you receiving Rhythm and News quarterly?
- Did you receive the thank you gift you requested?

In addition, we welcome your comments about programming, your membership, articles for Rhythm and News, or anything else you care to tell us. Call 1/800-861-8000; email: WOI@iastate.edu; or write to Membership Department, WOI Radio, 204 Communications Building, ISU, Ames, IA 50011.

Thank you for choosing to support—and listen to—WOI Radio. Remember **YOU** are the **PUBLIC** in Public Radio



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WOI Renewal Mail - Second Hi! Renewal Letter

Important Membership Information

Dear WOI Radio Member:

It's been almost a year since you made your annual membership contribution to WOI Radio.

In that year, you have enjoyed thousands of hours of great radio programming -news and information, music and entertainment -- all of which you helped make possible.

As you probably know, membership is the backbone of WOI. More than one-third of our annual budget comes from the thousands of listeners who don't just enjoy public radio. but make it a reality with their financial support. People just like you.

For the past year, you've been an indispensable part of the WOI family. I hope you'll continue that relationship now. That's why I am writing to you today.

Please take a moment to renew your membership. You'll secure uninterrupted delivery of WOI's quarterly newsletter, *Rhythm & News*. More importantly, you'll receive uninterrupted recognition as a member of WOI Radio. But, most of all, you will help assure continued service from the station you've helped build -- a radio service that for more than seventy-five years has seemed like a member of the family.

- WOI is your best source for news and information on radio, beginning each morning with WOI-AM *Morning Edition* host Charity Neb or WOI-FM *Morning Report* host Don Forsling... continuing with Don's *Talk of Iowa*, *Midday* with Doug Cooper, and *All Things Considered* in the evening.

- WOI is your source for music ... from classical favorites with Karen Bryan to great jazz with Curt Snook.

- WOI is your source for great entertainment, with Garrison Keillor on *A Prairie Home Companion*, the off-the-wall antics of Click and Clack on *Car Talk*, and Doug Brown's daily visits on *The Book Club*.

- WOI is your source for information of special significance to Iowa ... whether it's news reports from Joyce Russell, legislative updates from Mark Moran, or insightful weather information from Elwynn Taylor.

Your membership renewal gift to WOI Radio is a key factor in maintaining and improving this service. But just as important, it reaffirms to us that you support one of Iowa's most-used cultural treasures -- a resource that would not exist without you.

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

Over 82,000 listeners now listen to WOI each week. This testifies to the important role we play in Iowa. Simply put, WOI is the principal outlet for quality music and information for thousands of Iowans.

We could not have achieved this without your past financial support, and we want you to know how much we appreciate it. Thank you.

However, if we are to continue serving our listeners tomorrow, next month, and next year, we must rely on you as we have in the past. There is no more dependable source of funding for quality public radio than our members.

As you listen to us ... we look to you. Please renew your commitment to WOI Radio today. Write out the most generous check you can and return it in the mail/return envelope. We can also accept Visa or Mastercard charges.

I look forward to hearing from you and knowing that you look forward to another year of great programming on WOI. We welcome your comments: 1/800-861-8000.

Sincerely,

Carol Lamb

Carol Lamb
Membership Director

PS If your renewal gift and this letter have crossed in the mail, please accept my apologies and my thanks. But if not, please take a moment now to continue your financial support of WOI. Thank you.

does gourmet dinners once a week. Each drive, the owner gives us eight "wine experiences for two," and people really wait for that one. And there's an artist who makes sculptures out of old farm implements, like plows. People love them, and we have fun pitching them.

And here's a good one: on the last day of the drive, the manager of a [recently restored] hotel called in and said, I'll give a free night's stay in the hotel for everybody who calls in at the "Buck-a-Day" level. And I asked "do you have any idea what that could mean?" They said they wanted to do it, and 31 people called in with Buck-a-Day pledges [worth \$11,300 in pledges]. Boy were they surprised.

Did you expand your staff?

Not really.

Did you make any investments in hardware or software?

No. We're using MEMSYS, and we're waiting for the upgrade that Nick Hurlick has been talking about.

Did you initiate any outsourcing or hire any consultants?

Well, we were part of BoB, and [the DEI project] Precision Membership. We're also in the MGI (the Major Gift Initiative sponsored by SRG). We did institute some of the "Precision Membership" recommendations.

We started our renewal series a month earlier, and we added a fourth hit.

We really need to recognize that the

economy's been awfully good. On top of all that, I really have an excellent staff who have worked very hard. They deserve a lot of the credit for the improvements we've seen.

What activities that you started a few years ago showed increased returns?

Our renewal mailings and the installment plans. Those plans are going up appreciably each year.

How do you structure your plan?

We'll do whatever [listeners] want. Monthly, quarterly.... We do restrict the plan to at least \$5 per month.

You send out envelopes?

We do a mailing every month to all the people on the "install plan."

Do you see much attrition in that plan?

Not much. I can't give you a specific figure, but we'll be running a report on that.

Did you do anything this year that didn't work?

I did a lapsed member mailing. I'm not sure it worked, because I forgot to add a return instrument. We did see a few more rejoins during the spring drive, which I attribute to the lapsed member mailing.

I ask that question because often things that don't work are very important in helping people to make change. Sometimes it's easier to see and understand what's not working. Are you planning to make any major changes for next year?

Yes, definitely. We'll send our first additional gift mailing. We've never done

additional gift mail before. My first one is aimed at getting money for our new member challenge pool. We're going to continue to monitor our on-air drives, looking for something new or looking for something that's not working. We will also be looking carefully at our on-air performance to decide [the impact] of our emphasis on higher gifts. Is it a good strategy for the long run? Does it reduce new member response?

You're wondering if you might be pricing some people out of the market?

Yes. That's a possibility.

In April of 1994, we had 2,739 pledges with an average gift of \$63.35. Last spring we had 2,147 pledges... or 600 less... but our average was up to \$95 or \$100. That's the kind of thing you have to look at. Is the new strategy working?

Don't you think that you may be seeing

more people renewing through the mail?

Well, 60% of our members renew during drives. And I think we'd like to have it the other way around, with 60% of the pledges coming from new members.

What are you planning for next year that could have a major impact?

I already mentioned the changes in our mailing program... the six-month new-member mailing and the fourth renewal letter. We'll also be starting an EFT program this year, and we just hired a new account rep in underwriting.

But, I'm worried about next year because we're losing two of our very best people, Doug Brown, our Program Director, and Don Forsling. They are our best pitchers. Doug could go on the air and read the phone book, and people would call in with pledges. People just love him, and Don, too. That's going to make a big difference.



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Address Service Requested

Renewal Thank You

Dear WOI Supporter,
Thank you very much for your recent donation to WOI-Radio. Because of you, we can continue to bring great music and intelligent talk to Iowa and surrounding states.

If you ever have any questions about your membership account, please feel free to call us toll-free at 1-800-861-8000.

Great Music.
Intelligent Talk



We'll send a tax receipt for all payments at the end of January

Doug, Don, Karen, Mark, Joyce, Jake, Curt, Rachel, Elwynn, Doug & Charity



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WOI Renewal Mail - Third Hit Renewal Letter

URGENT

Dear WOI Radio Member:

Your annual membership in WOI Radio is about to expire. I don't want that to happen. It's very likely that this is not what you intend to do either.

Perhaps you've been planning to renew. If you're like me, there are too many days when you just can't do everything you mean to. So right now while you're thinking about it ... take a moment to renew your support.

Write out your check and send it in the mail/return envelope. Or charge your annual investment in WOI.

You will assure yourself of another year of the best radio available. And you will assure us that we have the support of our most important listener -- you.

Membership is WOI's major source of private support-- more than corporate and foundation support combined. So the loss of even one member affects us ... and each of our listeners. We want you to know how much we appreciate your past support; we hope we have earned your continuing support

Together, we make beautiful music. And news you can trust. Simply the best radio on radio.

For your convenience, you can call (800) 861-8000 Monday through Friday, 8 am to 5pm to charge your renewal on your Visa or Mastercard credit card. Don't let your membership expire. Please renew today.

Sincerely,

Carol Lamb

Carol Lamb
Membership Director

PS A WOI membership renewal form is enclosed, if you prefer to mail in your contribution. Thank you!

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

What impact has the BoB Project had on your work?

It has had a tremendous impact. Really. I can't begin to tell you. It's given me the time to do long-term planning. It's given me the confidence to experiment with things that I had been thinking of trying. It's changed the way we work. Now my plans are incorporated in the station budget. Before, I would say, "I'd like to do this..." and Don would say, "What's the payoff?" Because Don [Wirth] went to these meetings, I was able to show him how things would pay off over the long run, even if it meant I was going to go over budget this year. That's another big benefit of the project. It helped Don to see the value of my plans.

That's an important point, which I will have to think about for any renewal of the project.

I think it's necessary. That understanding [gained by the business manager] is really important. Plus, you get an extra pair of ears. Two people often hear different things and have different perspectives.

One intangible benefit of the project has been that we've become pretty good friends with people in the project, especially Cathy Ives and Gloria Zogopoulos from New Hampshire Public Radio. When our new account rep Linda Jordening came on board, I was able to introduce her to Cathy Ives.

I made some changes in our renewal letters. In the past, I wrote all of our direct mail letters and my letters weren't

that bad, but Jim's [Lewis] letters were better.

As I said, it has really made a difference for me. I was not very confident about my abilities. But being at those meetings really helped. Sitting at the meetings, listening to people, stealing their ideas. It's been wonderful. And I attribute a lot of the \$90,000 improvement to our participation in the project.

When you were changing, did you have specific stations in mind as models?

No. I haven't been in this work very long. I was only membership director for a year before we joined BoB. I didn't know whom to copy. But now, I do feel that I have some great examples to copy—and, to paraphrase Pogo, "They is us."

I hope that every station will have a chance to be involved in a project like BoB. When you go to conferences you just go around from room to room and you never get to think about anything in depth. But the BoB meetings have been so different. We have time to digest the information. The consultants have been terrific. I realize that it may not be cost effective, but maybe *small conferences* are the way to go.



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WOI Renewal Mail - Fourth Hit Renewal Letter

*If you don't renew now,
We lose a great member!*

Dear WOI Radio Member:

Imagine for a moment that you tuned to WOI one day and found something missing.

Imagine that your morning newscast wasn't there ... that your favorite classical music program had been replaced by rock ... or that you tuned to WOI and found nothing but static.

You would be concerned and wonder what had happened. You would call the station and ask for an explanation.

Let me assure you that none of this is about to happen. But something is missing.

That something is you. Unless you've written us in the past few days, we haven't received your annual renewal contribution. And that concerns me.

It concerns me because we count on you and other members of WOI Radio — those who appreciate the service enough to support it — for more than one-third of our annual budget.

But it also concerns me because I count our members as our best friends.

Perhaps you're no longer enjoying WOI as much as you used to. Perhaps you don't wake up to *Morning Edition* or *The Morning Report* with Don Forsling. Perhaps you no longer spend your day listening to classical music with Karen Bryan or no longer listen to *All Things Considered* or *Fresh Air*.

Perhaps you no longer listen to jazz with Curt Snook... or spend weekends with Garrison Keillor's *A Prairie Home Companion* or with Michael Feldman on *Whad'ya Know?* If there is something about WOI's programming that is bothering you, please call us-- 1/800-861-8000--or write and let us know. While we don't promise to please everyone, we do listen to our listeners' comments.

But if you still enjoy WOI, perhaps something else is wrong. Perhaps we've failed to tell you how important you are -- that WOI is utterly dependent on its members. Without your good will and financial support, WOI would not be the station you've come to depend on.

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

Something is missing at WOI, and that something is you.

Please, enclose your renewal gift in the mail/return envelope and send it to us today. Help us continue to provide you with the quality public radio you've come to depend on for great music and intelligent talk.

Consider for a moment how often you listen to WOI. Do we keep you company during a daily commute? Are we by your side at work during the day? Do you spend weekends listening to the station?

Add it up. I hope you'll find you listen to us a lot... and that WOI once again deserves your financial support.

I again want to thank you for your past support. We hope we have earned your continuing support. Please send in your annual renewal donation now.

Sincerely,

Carol Lamb

Carol Lamb
Membership Director

PS Many people come and go. We don't want one of them to be you. Please renew today.