Introduction

The Public Radio Exchange (PRX) is an online marketplace for distribution, review, and licensing of public radio programming. PRX is also a growing social network and community of listeners, producers, and stations collaborating to reshape public radio.

In the three years since its launch in September 2003 PRX has become a catalyst for innovation and change within public radio as well as a vital service for distributing, curating, and licensing diverse and relevant audio programs.

To date[1]:

- Public radio stations have downloaded over 10,000 radio pieces from PRX for broadcast to millions of listeners.

- PRX has distributed over $400,000 in payments to nearly 750 content providers.

- Over 13,000 pieces have been uploaded to PRX – creating the largest catalog of public radio programs available on-demand for broadcast and digital use.

- The PRX Editorial Board and listeners have written over 5,600 reviews of pieces on PRX – the largest collection of critical writing about public radio work in existence.

- The registered membership on PRX has grown to 28,000 users, including station staff, independent producers, other public broadcasting professionals, and listeners.

- Generation PRX – a special project area for youth media – has become a key resource and distributor for broadcast and digital

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[1] As of January, 2007

channels for over 40 youth radio groups across the country.

- PRX has played a pioneering role in podcasting, creating custom tools for stations and offering curated "feeds" of pieces from the PRX catalog through iTunes and other sites.

- PRX has attracted significant and ongoing support from funding institutions, including the MacArthur Foundation, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), the Ford Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Open Society Institute, and the Surdna Foundation.

- PRX has become a leader in industry discussions and forums, helping define and advocate for a new public media model that leverages the social and network effects of the Internet and digital media.

Key Concepts

At a time of rapid and fundamental change at the intersection of media and technology, PRX operates as a nimble and entrepreneurial team, harnessing new, cutting-edge ideas and tools and putting them to immediate use in the public media field.

In planning and developing its services PRX has been ahead of the curve in focusing on key concepts that have now become priorities for emerging models across broadcast and digital media industries:

- The Long Tail: PRX recognized that there is tremendous value in efficiently aggregating and distributing a large content catalog through digital access.

- Trusted filters and recommendation: PRX created a tiered review system that employs professional reviewers on an Editorial Board, open comment and rating by users, and recommendations that draw on these reviews and correlate usage data.

- Search: PRX created a custom search engine that mines

producer-contributed metadata to find relevant pieces for station and reviewer queries.

- Social network: PRX added a social dimension to the PRX service as a way of building trust and an architecture of participation that enables new connections and networks to form. Each user gets a public member profile, can contact other members, and can search and browse the membership directory in addition to pieces and reviews.

Our early attention to these features helped put PRX at the forefront of media and technology development not only within the public radio system but in the broader "web 2.0" movement.

Areas of Forward Focus

Heading into 2007 PRX will expand its services and scope to achieve a greater impact within and beyond the public media field, focused in these areas:

1) Aggregation and syndication for broadcast and beyond: PRX will continue to build a diverse and high quality catalog of audio work, reaching out to podcasters, youth producers, and new "citizen creators". In addition to continuing PRX's core service of providing programs to stations for broadcast and online use, PRX will aggressively open up new digital channels of distribution such as podcasting, iTunes and other digital a la carte, subscription and ad-supported services.

2) PRX streams and content packaging: as digital channels multiply there is increasing demand for more fully formed packages and collections of content. PRX is in a position to help assemble themed offerings that bundle pieces from the catalog to create continuous streams and formats for Internet radio delivery, HD radio channels, and terrestrial broadcast.

3) Catalyze content creation: with a growing network of professional and emerging producers and editors, PRX will work with partners to tap this talent pool, enabling the commissioning

of new work for broadcast and digital distribution.

4) Thought leadership and consultation: public media as an industry lacks research and development capacity. The open knowledge-sharing culture of PRX provides an important "R&D" service to the field. Through hands-on experience PRX has developed expertise in many areas of vital interest for public media producers, stations, and other organizations. Currently PRX consults on an ad-hoc basis to several stations, network initiatives at National Public Radio (NPR), Public Radio International (PRI), and American Public Media (APM), and a variety of producers. PRX intends to organize and grow this activity to achieve greater insights and influence in the field as well as develop a source of revenue.

There is an additional dimension of PRX's development that cuts across all of the above and connects with each aspect of PRX's services: the PRX social network.

Currently the social network functionality and features in the PRX platform are largely latent. The initial concept and planning for the main PRX service intentionally included a social layer, but the requirements of building, launching and developing the distribution and marketplace aspects of the platform in its first three years pushed the active nurturing of the social network to a secondary priority.

It is now clear that the structure and membership base of PRX presents a unique opportunity to activate a social site that combines business networking among public radio professionals with public participation in contributing, commenting on, and curating content for use across multiple delivery platforms.

Although social networking sites have proliferated in recent years, none targets participation by both professionals and the public in media creation and distribution. This is an important niche that PRX is perfectly positioned to develop as an increasingly broad community seeks to understand and connect with others in the rapidly evolving digital media environment.

Building Capacity

To achieve objectives in the areas of activity outlined above PRX anticipates increasing its organizational capacity in staffing, technology, and related contract services:

- Software development: the rapid evolution of web application development has fueled the creation of new media models on the Internet. Incorporating experienced technologists into the PRX team is essential for continuous and rapid innovation and for gaining insight into the architecture of the web's most powerful services. The market for talented developers is extremely competitive and PRX needs to be able to continue to attract top-notch staff.

- User interface design: on top of the code that runs web-delivered services, the user interface is the layer that can make or break public participation. PRX seeks to match the effort and imagination behind our tools and services with a more powerful presentation to the public. As the scale and scope of the services expand it is critical to invest in skillful design.

- Editorial selection and facilitation: PRX has made a point of locating much of its editorial activity in a distributed network of professionals and others outside the core staff. This approach leverages a diversity of experience and opinion and is scalable as the PRX catalog and distribution options grow. PRX needs a greater capacity to facilitate and coordinate the network as it expands.

- Sales and business development: PRX licenses content and generates revenue for hundreds of producers and stations, as well as direct support for its own operations. To advance ambitious public service goals PRX needs to expand the capacity to monetize its services across the board.

- Seed funding for content creation and "reversioning": PRX has aggregated thousands of audio pieces with zero investment in original content creation. There is now an important opportunity to leverage the PRX marketplace to help generate new work. So far a first round of reversioning support helped content providers

with valuable existing work update or digitize it for new distribution. A more ambitious model will use an auction-like mechanism to match stations, producers, and the public to identify and efficiently fund new work at a time when traditional funding models for new public service programming are under strain.

Conclusion

PRX is a new intermediary – a highly innovative organization that harnesses the democratizing capacities of the Internet to expand the very definition and design of public media. Building on a strong technology base, a broad network of users, an exceptional team, and an influential independent vantage point in a competitive system, PRX is uniquely positioned to create positive change and introduce path-breaking services at a critical time of reinvention in public media.