

POLICY PAPER

AN INFORMATION COMMUNITY CASE STUDY: SEATTLE

A digital community still in transition

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Seattle, Wash., could be considered a city singularly suited to develop a healthy democracy in the digital age. The city government, citizens and business have created a productive environment for the next generation of information-sharing and community engagement. Years of economic growth and relative prosperity have fostered new, superior practices in news and information. Yet, losing a major print newspaper, as Seattle did when *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer* stopped presses, going solely online, adversely affects a community, by leaving it with one less place to provide public service journalism, stories about people and general community updates. In parallel, Seattle has been at the center of an explosion of alternative news outlets, especially online, which has created a critical mass of information portals for geographic and social communities.



As the Knight Report, *Informing Communities: Sustaining Democracy in a Digital Age*, highlights, it is important to understand that there are three important elements to be considered as we analyze media and democracy in the 21st century:

- availability of relevant and credible information to all Americans and their communities;
- capacity of individuals to engage with information; and
- individual engagement with information and the public life of the community.

However, despite the relative vibrancy of the media scene, and even with all its demographic and other advantages, it is unclear how much of this innovation is sustainable. The local web is littered with websites that are no longer updated, and few of the startups boast anything like the journalistic firepower or profitability of the papers of the past. We applaud the efforts of these startups but are skeptical that many will sustain if their benchmark of success is profit alone. Moreover, much development is still needed for Seattle's information ecosystem to reflect the diverse perspectives of traditionally less-covered minority and financially disadvantaged communities. In short, though the media landscape in Seattle has many green shoots, few conclusions can be drawn about its longer-term future.

Introduction

Seattle entered the international spotlight in 1999 when tens of thousands of activists descended upon the city to protest a meeting of the World Trade Organization (WTO). These "Seattle People" earned the city's residents a reputation for outspoken activism, but the event was also an important bellwether for the influence of technology on the city's changing media environment.¹ The Independent Media Center (IMC) formed during the WTO protests for the purpose of disseminating breaking news online to people locally, nationally, and internationally.² The independent and alternative media organizations and activists who came together at the IMC delivered audio and video footage online and also published print coverage of the protests for local readers.³ More than a decade later, technology continues to play a significant role in the ways in which news and information are delivered to Seattle's diverse communities.

Much of the influence of technology on Seattle's local information ecology can be attributed to the region's economic influences. The information technology industry employs 90,000 people in the Seattle region, and the Puget Sound area is home to 150 interactive media companies, comprising an influential stake in that \$30 billion industry and putting Seattle at the forefront of technological innovation.⁴ Amazon.com is based in Seattle, and Microsoft based in Redmond, WA, employs 35,510 people across Washington State.⁵ It is also not to be forgotten that Microsoft launched one of the country's first online magazines, *Slate*, in 1996.⁶

The reach of the Seattle region's innovative technology sector stretches beyond its obvious implications for media: Pacific Northwest Community Grants, a special project of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, provides funding to area libraries, schools, and other community institutions in Seattle.⁷ With numerous technology start-ups on its doorstep, along with a thriving arts scene, many educational institutions, and robust neighborhoods, Seattle is as well positioned as any city, having many of the necessary components for effective civic engagement, and the following analysis assesses the degree to which the city is leveraging those advantages to meet the information needs of its community.

Considering the rise of digital media and a favorable environment culturally and demographically to online information, in January 2010, the group Journalism That Matters chose Seattle as the location for a conference titled "Re-Imagining News and Community in the Pacific Northwest." The event centered around questions of how the press and the public can help each other, new media possibilities for citizens, and how to "activate new forms of civic and public engagement." There, journalism thinkers,

practitioners, academics, activists, and news innovators gathered on the University of Washington campus to discuss the future of media in a democracy.⁸

The Great Recession has also left its mark on the city. Unemployment today is high -- about that of the national average -- and the city is facing a \$50 million general fund deficit for 2011. Revenues for the current budget are projected to be \$10 million less than anticipated⁹; Seattle adopted a \$3.85 billion budget for 2010.¹⁰

Demography of the Region

The Seattle population has been growing over the last decade. According to 2009 estimates, Seattle has 602,000 residents and a population density of 6,717 persons per square mile.¹¹ Seattle is located on the Puget Sound, about 100 miles south of Canada, and covers about 135 square miles. U.S. Census estimates in 2009 calculated the per capita income in Seattle at \$37,461 and December 2009 estimates from the Bureau of Labor Statistics counted the unemployment rate at 9.1%. The city has dozens of neighborhoods within 13 districts: Ballard, Central,

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Delridge, Downtown, East, Greater Duwamish, Lake Union, Magnolia/Queen Anne,

North, Northeast, Northwest, Southeast, and Southwest. Seattle is the seat of King County government, which covers 2,134 square miles and is home to 1.9 million people; King County is nearly twice the size of the average U.S. county and the 14th most populous county in the U.S. and includes 39 incorporated towns and cities.¹² King County is surrounded by Snohomish County (to the north), Pierce County (to the south), Kitsap County (to the west), and Chelan and Kittitas Counties (to the east).

In 2003 the Brookings Institute examined US Census data for Seattle and published the report, "[Seattle in Focus: A Profile from Census 2000](#)." The report noted that, as Seattle's population growth increased through the 1990s, the city's diversity also increased, with 27 percent of the population identifying as black, Asian and Hispanic.¹³ Immigration has also contributed to the city's diversity, and in April 2010, the US Census reported that the Southeast Seattle zipcode of 98118 comprises the nation's most diverse zip code, with residents speaking some 59 languages.¹⁴

Nearly 92 percent of the Seattle population holds a high school diploma or higher and 53.8 percent possess a bachelor's degree or higher, compared with 84.5% and 27.4%, respectively, at the national level.¹⁵ Seattle's media

market has been described as "a well-educated, affluent market with high levels of home ownership and a predominantly white-collar workforce."¹⁶

The city's 88 public schools enrolled 45,933 students in 2008, and Seattle is also home to over 300 private and parochial schools.¹⁷ Additionally, the public [University of Washington](#) is the city's largest employer, with 28,188 faculty and staff and annual revenue of \$3.7 billion.¹⁸ The city is home to 10 other universities, including a community college system with multiple campuses and four art schools. The University of Washington includes an Information School, which has done research on the benefits to the American public of providing Internet access at libraries, among other topics,¹⁹ as well as a department of communication. Students at the University of Washington also run *The Daily*, a newspaper published five days a week that covers the campus and local community.²⁰ [Seattle University](#) also has a communication/journalism department.

A nonprofit multimedia journalism organization, the Common Language Project, will launch the Digital Literacy Initiative in January 2011 in Seattle's public high schools through a joint effort with the University of Washington. The program will help students apply critical thinking skills to the news. In addition to training in the classroom during the year, the Initiative will offer a summer camp in which students can receive training in journalism production, from basic reporting to multimedia skills.²¹

Print Media

Until 2009, Seattle was a two-newspaper town with a business agreement between the two papers, [The Seattle Post-Intelligencer](#), owned by the Hearst Corporation, and [The Seattle Times](#). These rival newspapers shared a joint-operating agreement under which *The Times* was responsible for all business operations occurring outside the newsroom for both companies, such as delivery, printing, marketing, and advertising. When *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer* ceased print publication on March 17, 2009, journalists and media critics bemoaned the death of what had become a civic institution, and the city was left with *The Seattle Times*, which now had fewer operating expenses, but also had less revenue following Hearst's dissolution of the joint-operation agreement. Still, *Times* Vice President for Public Affairs Jill Mackie told *The New York Times* that the partnership had been a crucial move in sustaining *The Seattle Times* financially.²² *The Times* has had to renegotiate its debt and cut newsroom staff from 375 to 210 people over the last five years, but following the end of *The P-I's* print publication, *The Times* has been earning a profit and increased its print circulation in 2009 by 30%.²³ The Blethen family holds a majority share in *The Times* and the McClatchy company is also a partial owner.

Despite its financial tribulations, *The Seattle Times* has been recognized for its quality journalism. The *Times*, founded in 1896, reaches 7 out of 10 adults in King and Snohomish Counties, and its online counterparts ([SeattleTimes.com](#) and four marketplace sites) receive 5 million unique visitors each month.²⁴ *The Times* has won eight Pulitzer Prizes, including one in 2010 for its breaking news coverage of the murders of four Seattle police officers and the manhunt that followed.²⁵ In 2007, *The Times'*

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editorial pages published a series of essays, titled "The Democracy Papers," that examined the role of media in a democracy, with an eye to

this century's increasing media consolidation and the effects of online media on traditional media. Ryan Blethen, the paper's editorial page editor continues to discuss these issues in his blog on *The Times'* website.²⁶ Non-profit funding has also allowed *The Times* to expand its collaboration with other types of media outlets: Supported by American University's J-Lab: The Institute for Interactive Journalism and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, *The Times* is pairing up with four local news producers to promote and share local news published by all of the outlets involved. The four local producers are Amber Campbell of [The Rainier Valley Post](#), Tracy Record of the [West Seattle Blog](#) and [White Center Now](#), Kate Bergman of [Next Door Media](#) (which runs a number of local blogs), and Justin Carder, who runs [Capitol Hill Seattle](#) and who also helped create [Neighborlogs](#), discussed below.²⁷

Seattle is also served by a number of other alternative and niche print publications. [The Stranger](#) and [The Seattle Weekly](#) are Seattle's alt-newsweeklies. Three weekly neighborhood publications are owned by [Robinson Newspapers](#): [The Ballard News-Tribune](#), [West Seattle Herald](#), and [Highline Times](#). [The Belltown Messenger](#) is a neighborhood alt-monthly serving the Belltown neighborhood. Six weekly neighborhood publications are owned by the [Pacific Publishing Company](#): [Queen Anne and Magnolia News](#), [Madison Park Times](#), [Capitol Hill Times](#), [South Seattle Beacon](#), [North Seattle Herald and Outlook](#), [The Federal Way News](#), and [The Monroe Monitor and Valley News](#). Religious, ethnic, and niche print publications include the homeless-distributed [Real Change News](#), the Asian American-focused [International Examiner](#), [The Catholic Northwest Progress](#), [El Siete Dias](#) (serving the Spanish-speaking population), [Fishermen's News](#), [Nguoi Viet Tay Bac](#) (serving the Vietnamese community), [The North](#)

[American Post](#) (serving the Japanese community), [Northwest Asian Weekly](#) (serving the Asian community), [Puget Sound Business Journal](#), [The Seattle Chinese Post](#) (serving the Chinese community), [Seattle Daily Journal of Commerce](#), [Seattle Gay News](#), [The Seattle Medium](#) (African-American), [The Skanner](#) (African-American), and [Soy Source](#) (Japanese), among others.

In total, print media in Seattle employed approximately 335 journalists in the summer of 2010,²⁸ despite particularly acute losses (150 staff cuts in December 2008 alone)²⁹ in recent years at the *Seattle Times* and drastic reductions when the P-I went online only in spring 2009 and 145 jobs were lost.³⁰

Smaller print media staffs have necessitated shifts in how news is covered. At *The Seattle Times*, for example, the daily business section was consolidated and folded into the A section following 2008's deep staff cuts.³¹ The *Times* had already decreased its print content in 2004, with an 18% cut to the overall news hole, which reduced movie listings, sports, travel, syndicated material, and other arts and entertainment coverage.³² While *The Times'* managing editor attested that individual reporters do not have to meet any specific output quota, she noted that reporters are doing more across online and social media platforms, in addition to the work they publish in print.³³ When *The Seattle P-I* became an online-only publication, it cut back original reporting to focus on subjects such as crime, transportation, and the aviation industry and began linking to other news outlets for coverage of other beats.³⁴

Internet Media

The front page of the last print edition of the *Seattle P-I* featured a photo of the building's iconic globe with the caption, "You've meant the world to us." But did the *P-I* really encompass the city's media world? In recent years, community and hyperlocal blogs and online start-ups have sprung up in the Seattle area. With the move of the *Seattle P-I* to online-only publication on March 18, 2009, the cutting of its news staff from 165 to 20 and the precarious status of the last print newspaper standing, *The Seattle Times*, there exist numerous opportunities for alternative media to fill gaps in local coverage. The current website, SeattlePI.com, has continued to expand by adding blogs from readers. The site also features 9 neighborhood blogs and is looking to add 14 more, covering neighborhoods in and around the city. SeattlePI.com collaborates with a number of additional local and national media outlets to share news and content: *KOMO-TV* (ABC affiliate), *Q13-FOX TV*, local suburban weekly newspaper chain [Sound Publishing](#), [TVGuide.com](#), [Film.com](#), [Seattle Magazine](#), as well as content from Hearst Corporation-owned newspapers and magazines. SeattlePI.com's first significant foray into community engagement came

through its "[Big Blog](#)," which covers local news. The founding reporter for that blog, Monica Guzman, also held regular meet-ups with members of the community, a trend that has since caught on among other local bloggers.³⁵

In the Seattle region, 43% of adults regularly read news online and 21% read or contribute to blogs.³⁶ A compilation of Seattle websites focused on local neighborhoods or communities commissioned by the City of Seattle Information Technology department identified 260 non-traditional, linked news and information outlets -- from hyperlocal blogs to civic organization Facebook pages -- that span the city's 13 districts. Some of these online news sources have made use of government data in ways that are outside the scope of television news programs or city-wide newspapers. For example, [Capitol Hill Seattle](#) took advantage of a data set on designated heritage trees ("the oldest, largest, or most unique tree of that species in the city or neighborhood in which it resides") made public by the City of Seattle and created a map of historically significant trees in the Capitol Hill neighborhood.³⁷ A growing number of blogs are devoting resources to covering local and state political news, notably *PublicCola*, which provides a balance of civic news and cultural columns, but recently announced plans to refocus on political news.³⁸



The sites vary greatly in scope, resources, and web traffic. The ten blogs in the Next Door Media network, for example, net a combined 1 million page views per month, but SeattleTimes.com and SeattlePI.com lead the pack with 45 and 40 million page views per month, respectively.³⁹ Smaller sites such as [Wallyhood](#) receive approximately 50,000 page views per month; [Capitol Hill Seattle](#) receives 200,000 page views per month; and [West Seattle Blog](#) receives 750,000 monthly page views.⁴⁰ Many of the sites rely on the volunteer efforts of their contributors, who often have journalism backgrounds. Some appear to be earning a

profit or at least sustaining themselves. The *Neighborlogs* (neighborlogs.com) community news network, which sees 125,000 unique visitors per month, pays three full-time employees.⁴¹ Capitol Hill Seattle invites readers to contribute to the blog and become part of a profit-sharing scheme through which writers earn a portion of the advertising revenue relative to the number of views their posts generate. The site also claims to set aside 10% of advertising space for local businesses.⁴² Some sites were founded or are staffed by former journalists from Seattle's television stations and newspapers, such as *SeattlePost-Globe.org*, started by former *Seattle P-I* staffers, and Next Door Media, a hyperlocal news network covering ten neighborhoods. (Next Door Media founder Kate Bergman formerly worked for *KING 5* and *Northwest Cable News*, and co-founder Cory Bergman formerly led *KING5.com* and *NWCN.com*.) Next Door Media this year partnered with the University of Washington journalism school for a hyperlocal news site covering the University District.

A recent partnership between KING-TV and *The Seattle Times*, BeLocal, will create a network of advertisers to fund hyperlocal sites such as these. The TV station and newspapers's digital ad sales teams will combine efforts to offer advertising to bloggers, with profits shared among all parties involved.⁴³

Additionally, as mainstream media's resources to provide investigative journalism have dwindled, a number of online start-ups have appeared to fill in the gaps. California-based Spot.us, an investigative journalism organization that pursues stories commissioned by members of the public, recently launched a Seattle unit.⁴⁴ *InvestigateWest*, founded in July 2009, and *Crosscut*, founded in April 2007, are both nonprofit journalism organizations that serve the Northwestern U.S.⁴⁵ Both of these sites see themselves as providing a role the traditional media cannot or do not fulfill. *InvestigateWest* runs in-depth investigative reports on stories such as sexual assault on college campuses,⁴⁶ and *Crosscut* aims to provide analytical, bipartisan viewpoints on a variety of political and cultural issues.⁴⁷

Among ethnic media, the latest entrant to the city Sea Beez, a content-sharing website for local ethnic media outlets. It is part of a group of New America Media-sponsored hyperlocal, ethnic media sites. As an organization, Sea Beez also serves to increase collaboration among ethnic media outlets and public, private and community organizations. A Sea Beez news website will launch next fall.⁴⁸

Internet Media: Content Analysis

A study we conducted of *The Seattle Times*, SeattlePI.com, and four neighborhood blogs revealed coverage of different news subjects across outlets. For three nonconsecutive days over a three-week period, we looked at the headlines on the

home pages of SeattleTimes.com and SeattlePI.com, as well as those of the blogs *Capitol Hill Seattle*, *My Ballard*, *Wallyhood*, and *West Seattle Blog*.⁴⁹ An analysis of all the headlines included on each homepage showed that the blogs provided more local coverage specific to the neighborhoods they served than did the city-wide *Seattle Times* and *SeattlePI.com*. Specifically, *Capitol Hill Seattle* devoted 97 percent of its blog posts to neighborhood-specific issues in the Capitol Hill area of Seattle, while *West Seattle Blog*, *Wallyhood*, and *My Ballard* devoted 96, 93, and 81 percent, respectively, to the neighborhoods covered by those news outlets. *The Seattle Times* devoted an average of 11 percent of the articles on its homepage to issues concerning specific neighborhoods in Seattle, while 12 percent of stories on SeattlePI.com covered such topics.

We also coded for stories that covered subjects identified by the Knight Commission Report as serving local information needs, which covered political, health, education,

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employment, social service, and arts and entertainment news. Each of the news outlets studied devoted the following percentage of stories listed

on homepage to these subjects: *West Seattle Blog*: 84 percent; *Capitol Hill Seattle*: 68 percent; *Wallyhood*: 63 percent; *My Ballard* 50 percent; *SeattlePI.com*: 42 percent; and *The Seattle Times*: 38 percent. The study did not distinguish between original and republished content within each category, but overall, the results found that nearly 100 percent of content on *My Ballard*: 96 percent of content on *West Seattle Blog*: 89 percent of content on *Capitol Hill Seattle*. and 60 percent of content on *Wallyhood* was original on the days studied. (This study did not consider whether individual stories covered by the blogs were picked up from original coverage by mainstream media outlets.)

However, a follow-up look at one morning's coverage for each of the outlets examined above suggested that the blogs are reporting on some stories that are not covered by mainstream media outlets. As a follow-up, one story was chosen from each blog and tracked across the other five outlets included in the study above. Of the four stories tracked, one, which reported on a meeting between the mayor and residents of a neighborhood affected by a bridge closure, was entirely original to *West Seattle Blog*.⁵⁰ A story on the Seattle Public Library's new smart phone app in *Capitol Hill Seattle* was preceded by a blog post by a member of the library staff on the library's own blog on

SeattlePI.com the month before, but the *Capitol Hill Seattle* post contained more analysis and reporting.⁵¹ In another example, *My Ballard* published a post about a local artist whose work reflected subjects in the Ballard neighborhood;⁵² this was preceded by a brief mention in a longer arts piece on a SeattlePI.com reader blog three months earlier.⁵³ Finally, the fourth story examined, a *Wallyhood* post⁵⁴ on the city's noise study on a local canal where ships pass, followed one day after a *Seattle Times* article⁵⁵ on the same subject, but contained less detail. The *Wallyhood* post was then republished on partner site SeattlePI.com.⁵⁶ In none of these instances did authors of the more recent stories link back or otherwise refer to earlier reporting on the same subject in other publications. These four examples suggest that making claims about the originality of content published in different media outlets is not a clear-cut process; nonetheless, it demonstrates that mainstream media are not the sole providers of original content when it comes to local news. And while not comprehensive, this preliminary study suggests that these online news start-ups, with less content and narrower focus than the two established city-wide outlets, serve different information needs than their counterparts in the mainstream media.

In total, Internet media in Seattle employed 104 journalists in summer 2010. These include all those listed as contributors to online-only media that self-identified as news outlets; not all of those counted are necessarily paid or full-time employees of the media to which they contribute.⁵⁷ As in other media, but particularly online, where relatively few contributors are paid for their work, there may also be overlap in production, as journalists report in various media on a freelance basis.

Public Television

Seattle's public, government and community television stations include the [Seattle Channel](#) (Cable Channel 21), run by the city government; [KCTS](#) (PBS--Channel 9); and public access channel [SCAN-TV](#) (Cable Channel 77). In total, public television in Seattle employed approximately 132 journalists in 2010.⁵⁸

The Seattle Channel is an award-winning government-sponsored and -run station that airs public affairs, community service, and arts programming, among other topics, both online and on cable television.⁵⁹ Launched in 2002, the channel is funded in part by cable franchise fees and supplemented with a \$5 million infusion of funds from Comcast for arts programming, to be paid out over a 10-year period. The Seattle Channel began by offering civic-oriented programming, such as airing city council meetings, but has expanded to coverage of cultural affairs, as well. General Manager Gary Gibson was named one of Seattle's most influential figures by *Seattle Magazine*.⁶⁰ In

its early years, critics complained about the amount of air time the mayor occupied on the channel, but more recently, the Seattle Channel has received accolades for its original, engaging arts programming.⁶¹ Indeed, the network's programming is surprisingly diverse: Ongoing series include *Art Zone with Nancy Guppy*, *Ask the Mayor*, *Community Stories*, *Front Row* (on performance art), *History in Motion* (showcasing historical films from Seattle's Municipal Archive), *Neighborhood News* (covering the city's 97 neighborhoods), *Seattle's Public Art*, and *Seattle's Sister Cities* (a look at cities around the world with which Seattle has developed relationships). As the Seattle Channel has expanded its arts features, it increased emphasis on providing live streaming and programs that include the nuts-and-bolts government accountability programming to the Internet, which are best accessed only by viewers with high-speed Internet access.

KCTS 9 operates three strands of programming in the Seattle area. The first station is the primary high-definition, general interest station and PBS affiliate. The second, KCTS 9 V-ME, serves Seattle's Spanish-speaking community. A

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third station, KCTS 9 Create, features DIY, cooking, arts and crafts, and travel programs. One-third of the publicly funded network's

viewers are in southwestern British Columbia, and they, too, contribute donations to PBS.⁶² In total, KCTS 9 has over 2.4 million viewers per week, 1.6 million of whom are in Washington State. In 2009 the station broadcast 160 episodes as part of regularly airing series on local public affairs, personal finance, business affairs, and economic issues. KCTS also aired 19 local specials on issues including Washington's national parks and the impact of the economic crisis. KCTS 9 is regularly the top-viewed PBS station for individual programs such as *FRONTLINE*, *NOVA*, and *Independent Lens*.⁶³ In terms of local public affairs and community-oriented programming, however, KCTS offers less than either the Seattle Channel or SCAN.

The goal of Seattle's public access network, *SCAN*, is "to be a leading sector of the Seattle and King County digital 'commons', where every voice has value," according to the organization.⁶⁴ In the course of doing so, the 501(c)3 nonprofit provides equipment and production facilities for citizens of Seattle and other King County communities. Despite limited funds, SCAN often broadcasts more locally-produced public affairs programming per week than all

broadcast television channels combined. The station also provides media literacy and production training, including classes on video editing. SCAN's Youth Media program provides instruction in digital media production to Seattle youth in conjunction with organizations such as Youth Media Institute, the Boys and Girls Club, Reel Grrls, and Youth Speaks Seattle. The content produced in these workshops airs during dedicated Youth Media programming spots five days a week.⁶⁵

Commercial Television

Seattle's primary commercial television stations are [KOMO](#) (ABC affiliate--Channel 4), [KIRO](#) (CBS affiliate--Channel 7), [KING 5](#) (NBC affiliate--Channel 5), [KCPQ](#) (Fox affiliate--Channel 13), and [KSTW](#) (CW--Channel 11). In total, commercial television in Seattle employed 131 journalists in 2010.⁶⁶

KING 5, the local NBC affiliate, is owned by the Belo Corporation. The station has been recognized for its reporting with 56 Regional Emmy nominations in 38 categories in 2010. These 56 nominations included recognitions for station excellence; news (spot, investigative, general assignment, weather, environmental, military, and sports); local programming (human interest, feature segments, arts and entertainment, historical/cultural, public affairs and hosts); promotions; and public service.⁶⁷ KING 5 highlights the contributions of average citizens to the community in the feature "Home Team Heroes"⁶⁸ and also allows viewers to submit their own photo and video content via [KING5.com](#).⁶⁹

KOMO is owned by Fisher Communications, which also owns KOMO.2--ThisTV, KUNS TV--Univision, KOMO 1000 Newsradio, [KVI Talk Radio](#) 570 AM, and [KPLZ](#) Star 101.5 FM. Fisher Communications partnered with DataSphere Technologies last year to launch a series of 53 hyperlocal websites as a part of a larger "broadcast to broadband initiative" within the company. DataSphere provides the technology, advertising, and sales expertise to engage local advertisers, and KOMO provides the news content.⁷⁰ The hyperlocal sites include message boards, real estate listings, blog posts, links to other neighborhood websites (government and private), and advertisements from sponsors for each of the featured neighborhoods in and around Seattle. Stories posted to the blog have a "community" bent to them, focusing on subjects such as community service, news of interest to families, crime news, and events taking place around the neighborhood.

KIRO (CBS--7), which is owned by Cox Communications, notably maintains three reporters in a Washington, DC, bureau to cover news that affects viewers in Western Washington State, one of whom has also spent some time as a reporter in Washington State. The station uses its website as a place to showcase video footage from behind

the scenes of the stories it broadcasts, detailing some of the factors behind the production of the news. KIRO's website also features footage from its local High School Spirit competition, which encourages viewers to vote for the local high school with the most school spirit.⁷¹

KSTW, owned by CW, which in turn is owned by CBS, features news about community issues on "CW11 Connects." Recent stories have been accompanied by links on the channel's website to external housing, credit, mental health, and drunk driving prevention resources, and the network is also raising awareness of environmental issues through its "Project Green" spots.⁷² KCPQ (Q13 Fox), owned by the Tribune Company, broadcasts five and a half hours of local news programming each weekday; the station is also affiliated with [MyQ2](#), the My Network affiliate.⁷³

Radio

The radio dial in Seattle is solidly packed, with a mixture of locally- and non-locally-owned commercial stations, and noncommercial stations of various flavors.⁷⁴ In total, commercial and public radio in Seattle employed approximately 156 journalists in 2010.⁷⁵

[KEXP-FM](#) is a community-oriented public radio station operated by University of Washington. Its focus is mostly music, though it has some public affairs programming on the weekends. [KUOW](#) is the primary NPR station for the Puget Sound area, based at the University of Washington.

Seattle also picks up the signal for [KPLU](#), the Tacoma NPR station based at Pacific Lutheran University. [KBCS](#) is a community radio station operated at Bellevue College, outside Seattle (music, cultural, and public affairs programming). Some Internet-only radio stations such as [Hollow Earth Radio](#), a Pacific Northwest station based in Seattle, foster the local music scene and play less mainstream music.⁷⁶

[Kris Bennett Broadcasting](#) runs a trio of stations serving the local black community (KRIZ, KYIZ and KJIZ). In addition, two local high schools have radio stations. The Nathan Hale High School station, [KNHC-FM \(89.5, Seattle\)](#), has a highly regarded national reputation.

While public radio stations include some news coverage, news coverage on Seattle's commercial radio stations is less consistent. KIRO (97.3 FM) airs 34 hours of news per week, the majority of which is local, original reporting; including news analysis segments, news-related programming reaches 91 hours per week. KIRO employs about 30 people

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in its newsroom, having lost three to four employees in the last two to three years, according to the station's news director.⁷⁷ KOMO-AM 1000 (97.7 FM) airs news and news commentary 24 hours per day, 7 days per week.⁷⁸ Kris Bennett Broadcasting includes 5 hours of local talk radio programming across its three stations each week.⁷⁹

A number of commercial stations air little to no news. [JACK-FM](#) (96.5) eschews talk programming completely; the station's website proclaims, "96.5 JACK FM has no [talk](#), on-air promotions, traffic reports, news, weather, or anything else that gets in the way of the music."⁸⁰ The only news spots broadcast on [KJR](#), a sports station, are traffic updates, and [KKNW](#), a talk radio station, airs no news segments. [KKOL](#) airs syndicated Bloomberg Radio content, and the Seattle stations owned by [Salem Communications](#) (KLFE, KKOL, KGNW, KKMO, and KNTS) air only syndicated news programming.

Local Government

The Seattle government has a strong web presence and policies relating to transparency, including open records laws. On April 27, 2009, the Seattle City Council passed Ordinance No. 122969, regarding the implementation of the Public Records Act for the State of Washington.⁸¹ The City website also publishes City Council minutes, bills, ordinances, resolutions, and comptroller files.

The City has made civic engagement in the digital era a priority. Some of this intent was reflected in the initial creation in the mid '90s of their Public Access Network (*PAM*) and then in a 2002 Seattle Commission on Electronic Communications report.⁸² The City website, [Seattle.gov](#), is a portal for community information that reflects community needs and interests and provides tools for civic understanding. The City's Department of Information Technology, dubbed DoIT, promotes broadband adoption, and last year it initiated a new effort for City of Seattle Government 2.0. The initiatives include a public engagement portal, social media strategies, such as maintaining a YouTube and Twitter presence, city department blogs, a public forum to discuss and rank issues, an interactive map "mashup" of public safety service locations, and open data feeds.⁸³

Alongside the distribution of online information and services, the City has a long history of working to ensure residents have the technology access and literacy required to participate. This includes creating a position for a Community Technology planner and their Technology Matching Fund program, established in 1997.⁸⁴ The City has tracked residential technology adoption and e-gov participation since 2000. As a result of cable franchise negotiations, Comcast has provided \$500,000 for youth civic participation. The city IT department recently collaborated with the University of Washington Center for

Communication and Civic Engagement, the YMCA and One Economy's Digital Connectors to launch PugetSoundOff.org, an online forum for the city's youth. The site last year won a first place Technology Solutions Award for Web and E-Government Services from the Public Technology Institute.⁸⁵ The department in April 2010 launched Seattle Communities Online, a program to promote digital literacy through discussion and training on online tools. For example, the department has collected an inventory of neighborhoods' online presence and made the raw data available, posted information online using a Wordpress blogging system, used Twitter for business promotion, and posted tools to help online communities develop.⁸⁶

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Seattle's Chief Technology Officer Bill Schrier is the president of the government information technologist

s group Metropolitan Information Exchange. He was elected to the one-year post in September 2009.⁸⁷

The city has dozens of neighborhoods within 13 districts: Ballard, Central, Delridge, Downtown, East, Greater Duwamish, Lake Union, Magnolia/Queen Anne, North, Northeast, Northwest, Southeast, and Southwest. Many community institutions in Seattle foster a neighborhood-centric perspective. There are, for example, 27 neighborhood branches of the Seattle Public Library and five historical societies devoted to local neighborhoods and regions.

The city holds town hall meetings to discuss citywide initiatives, as well as smaller town halls within voting districts. Although the neighborhood blogs are not generally aligned with voting districts (the blogs cover smaller areas), these sites are the most likely news medium to provide notice of upcoming town halls and to cover those events when they occur. For example, the week of April 19, 2010, *My Ballard* (MyBallard.com) had nine posts on opportunities for neighborhood or city-wide civic engagement, including notices of town hall meetings and announcements that Seattle Parks and Recreation was looking for citizen help to name several new parks.

Countywide Community Forums is a nonprofit group whose mission is to "make democracy more user-friendly" by scheduling neighborhood meet-ups around King County. Volunteers sign up to lead hyperlocal discussions of issues in homes, coffee shops, or other convenient places

for a gathering of interested citizens.⁸⁸ In April 2010, the Community Forums group, through the Social Capital Review blog, launched [Public Data Ferret](#), a retrieval system for public documents stored online at all levels of government. Forums Director and Review Founder Matt Rosenberg has scheduled appearances on a *KOMO 1000* morning radio show to talk about accessing open records.

Additionally, Sarah Schacht's 501(c)3, [Knowledge as Power](#), has built a platform called KAPcitizen to support citizen engagement in the legislative process. Their online service provides free legislation tracking, news and communication tools covering the Washington State Legislature, and it will expand to cover Seattle City Council in 2010. KAPcitizen will begin covering three additional states in 2011. Knowledge As Power also founded and ran a regional open government conference, [Open Gov West](#), hosted at Seattle City Hall. This conference inspired local OGW meet-ups in Seattle and six other cities on the U.S. and Canadian West Coast, the creation of a British Columbia analogue to OGW, and the convening of an open government standards conference to be held in October 2010. Seattle City Government is working with Schacht to make its legislative and budgetary information available through the City's [Data.seattle.gov](#) website, and the City's Department of Information Technology will take into account Knowledge As Power's summer 2010 study usability study for its fall 2010 redesign of Seattle.gov.⁸⁹

A group advised by Dr. Lewis Friedland of the University of Wisconsin School of Journalism and Mass Communications has chosen Seattle as a possible test site for a *common civic space* program for news, known as The Seattle Civic Communication Commons, that will share resources in which participating benefits the all people within the city or region more than a individual or group.

The Seattle Commons would grow from the existing resources in neighborhoods, communities, the non-profit sector, government, and business. The Seattle Commons will be built and maintained by many hands with widespread ownership and responsibility in the civic space. A major assumption of the commons is that citizens increasingly live their lives in both physical and virtual spaces.⁹⁰

In May 2010, the Seattle Center Foundation agreed to make the Commons a part of their collective vision for Seattle on the 50th Anniversary of the Seattle World's Fair.

Arts and Entertainment, Social Service, and Health Information

The online portal of the Seattle city government includes a number of pages with resources on [health](#) and [social](#)

[service](#) information. These include directories of hospitals, clinics, and services for children, families, the disabled, and the elderly. However, in addition to linking to existing organizations and institutions, the website itself also serves as an information resource on health-related and domestic issues.

Media outlets are more likely to provide links to outside sources of information or coverage of events held to raise awareness or funds for a social or health-related cause than to provide direct coverage of health and social service news.

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For example, broadcaster [KSTW](#) (CW-11) includes links to a smattering of social service organizations on its website, in conjunction with stories it has shown on air. Health coverage in blogs is often

pegged to a fundraising event for a particular cause, while that on TV news programs frequently focuses on nutritional and diet-related topics.

There is little coverage of general social service-related information that is not pegged to the news cycle. In a rare exception to this, the *West Seattle Blog* proclaimed April 2010 "Disaster Preparedness Month" and published near-daily [posts](#) with safety tips for residents in case of various emergencies.⁹¹

According to the Americans for Arts Association, Seattle is the top-ranked American city for arts-related businesses per capita.⁹² Stock photography company Getty Images, for example, which often provides images to other media outlets, is based in Seattle. All the news media include arts and entertainment listings; blogs and online news start-ups are most likely to cover small-scale events with a neighborhood focus. A local organization, [Reel Grrls](#), offers programs to young women from underserved neighborhoods in Seattle that combine filmmaking instruction with mentoring. Reel Grrls often partners with the King County Department of Juvenile Justice and youth-oriented service organizations such as the Atlantic Street Center to hold video camps.

Libraries

Last year, the [Seattle Public Library](#) system served 14 million customers, a 7 percent rise over 2008, according to the library website. The city libraries offer media literacy coursework and multiple services to patrons, both online and in-person, including free online homework help; ask-

your-librarian by email, chat, text, or phone; a blog for teens; and computer classes. All libraries provide free wi-fi as well as a number of public computers. The Seattle Public School system also encourages media literacy training with “The Source,”⁹³ a learning support system used by students, school faculty, and parents, and the use of technologies such as Google Earth and multimedia applications.

As mentioned above, the City of Seattle's Community Technology Program offers some media training, mostly online media, to the public, as well as grants to community organizations to foster digital literacy, use of technology for community building and production of media content.⁹⁴ A number of local organizations who have received these grants offer media training, including the [Youth Media Institute](#), [Reclaim the Media](#), Reel Grls, [Jack Straw Productions](#), and the [Technology Access Foundation](#), which focuses on computer hardware and programming skills for youth of color. Additionally, the city maintains a directory of community technology centers and provides free cable broadband to centers through terms negotiated in the City's cable franchises. .

The city budget shortfalls for 2010 and 2011 have required mid-year cost cutting in the library system. The library will have to cut 3% of its budget, or \$1.5 million. To do this, the library system will reduce operating hours and close for one week this year.⁹⁵ Also, the library's 2010 budget is \$1.77 million lower than the 2009 budget.

Broadband Connectivity

In 2009, *Forbes* magazine ranked Seattle the most wired city in the U.S., and tenth in broadband connectivity.⁹⁶ Adults in the Seattle area use e-mail more than those in any other American media market, and the Seattle market also ranks third for Internet use among adults (by percentage of population).⁹⁷

Nonetheless, distinct digital divide inequalities persist in Seattle. Low income families and people of color in Seattle are about 30% less likely to access high-speed Internet at home than their higher-income and white neighbors.⁹⁸ They are also less likely to use the Internet for a number of applications.⁹⁹

The range of competitive broadband options offered in the city is not extensive. Comcast is one broadband service provider in Seattle. Comcast lists monthly prices of \$42.95 for service with download speeds of 15 Mbps and upload speeds of 3 Mbps and speeds up to 50 Mbps download and 10 Mbps upload for \$99.¹⁰⁰ Broadstripe is a smaller local provider, and the company is in bankruptcy. However, the company's general manager announced in a March 2010 “Let's Get Connected” discussion panel that customers with a cable modem should be getting up to 10 Mbps download

speeds.¹⁰¹ Qwest provides DSL up to 7 mbps download speed in some areas, but as little as 1.5 mbps in others.¹⁰² Clearwire is a relatively new entrant to the market and offers wireless broadband that reaches some neighborhoods not served by wireline connections. A check on the company website indicates 4G network mobile broadband speeds of up to 6 Mbps download and 1 Mbps upload are available in the University District for \$40 per month.¹⁰³

Wi-fi is widely available across Seattle, but most available signals are run privately by cafes or other businesses. The City of Seattle has installed free public wi-fi in two

The city government, engaged citizens and business have created a productive environment for the next generation of information-sharing and community engagement.

commercial areas, parts of Columbia City and parts of the University District, four downtown parks and the City Hall lobby and conference rooms. King County's Metro

Transit has experimented with offering wi-fi on buses. Seattle also has applied for Google's Fiber for Communities scheme.¹⁰⁴ City-operated fiber networks currently serve many of Seattle's schools, libraries, and public safety and government buildings.¹⁰⁵

Seattle has been investigating the possibility of a fiber-to-the-premises (FTTP) network throughout the past decade. The initial inquiry originated from a commission that involved local community leaders from Microsoft and Boeing.¹⁰⁶ A 2006 City Council task force recommended that Seattle invest in a municipal fiber broadband network system, and a growing community network called the Seattle Digital Justice Coalition is pressing the city to take action on that recommendation. The City received more than 30 replies to its Request for Information and interviewed at least 10 in the fall of 2006, but the City has not issued a Request for Proposals due to the absence of financing.¹⁰⁷ Mayor Mike McGinn, the second consecutive mayor to consider bringing a fiber network to Seattle, supports this initiative, and the City Council included addressing the city's broadband needs on its list of priorities for 2010. It is unclear, however, if or when the City will implement this project especially given the financial climate. However, the City does own the poles as a result of a municipal electrical utility, City Light, and thus is well positioned to move ahead.^{108, 109}

Conclusion: Do citizens and communities have all the information they want and need?

In many ways, Seattle is a model society for a healthy democracy in the digital age. The city government, engaged citizens and business have created a productive environment for the next generation of information-sharing and community engagement. Years of managed growth, unusually highly educated residents and general prosperity have fostered new, superior practices in news and information that are years ahead of other parts of the country.

The people of Seattle value an accessible government, accessible education and prosperous communities and they use new tools to achieve those ideals. Seattle has strong open records laws. The city aspires to broadband access that is high-speed, affordable and widespread. Community outreach efforts and new media training are high priorities among officials, who have proactively suggested solutions to information problems.

The city government's website provides a dynamic repository of information residents need to make decisions for their well-being. City newsfeeds alert residents to the latest program or issues. Public access broadcasting is strong, offering original programming across multimedia, although the greatest diversity in programming is found among the least-well funded community media outlets.

These public elements in the information infrastructure are especially important during a protracted economic downturn affecting news businesses. The city of 600,000 people, in a county with a population nearing 2 million, now has only one major daily print newspaper, as the secondary daily newspaper migrated to online-only due to a weakened print news industry in flux. Understanding the reality of remaining relevant in today's Internet society, the remaining newspaper is committed to adapting to the new news environment through collaborations with other local news providers. Commercial broadcast companies are experimenting with their own hyperlocal sites. Traditional media outlets, with the exception of the loss of the second daily newspaper, continue to deliver information to general and niche audiences.

Academia has also contributed to the new news foundation as the University of Washington prepares future journalism students in a progressive local news environment. The university's journalism school is partnering with a hyperlocal start-up site to cover the campus neighborhood.

Public and private entities are working flexibly to keep the people of Seattle connected to what they need. The

sensibilities are established for continued demand for better information services.

Despite the extensive jobs lost across Seattle media outlets in 2009, there are an estimated 858 journalists practicing across platforms in Seattle.¹⁰

However, the concentration of ownership, with four firms owning 51% of the area's local news market, provides evidence of highly concentrated media ownership.¹¹ A protracted economic downturn will likely slow implementation of digital community engagement initiatives, but the vision is there, in many cases.

Moreover, this optimism for a media space that is relatively vibrant and efficacious in the digital age has to be considered in the light of broadband prices that are beyond a segment of the population and the fact that already a number of websites spawned in the digital enthusiasm present across the region are already derelict and no longer updated. Other efforts vibrant now might not be sustained in the long run if they need to return profits to their

In short, there is much to be lauded in Seattle, but little is guaranteed in a media market that has only recently lost significant journalistic resources.

owners and pay salaries that encourage journalists to make a career in the field.

This doesn't mean that the blogs won't survive, but we wonder if they will end up staffed by a rotating set of part-time contributors rather than experienced journalists. Furthermore, it isn't clear that the less wealthy parts of Seattle will ever see the journalistic coverage that more affluent neighborhoods receive.

In short, there is much to be lauded in Seattle, but little is guaranteed in a media market that has only recently lost significant journalistic resources, few of which have been replaced by a burgeoning blogosphere that appears to provide complementary rather than replacement coverage.

Optimism must be tempered with the recognition that much paid investigative reporting capacity is gone--probably forever—and a significant segment of the population is unconnected and cannot afford to be otherwise. Ensuring that both these issues are addressed should be a high priority for Seattle if its reputation as a hub of media innovation is to be truly earned.

Notes on Methodology and Scope

This case study has been developed by a small team in Washington, D.C. Much of the initial data were collected via a scan of local websites, subsequent to which a targeted set of interviews was undertaken alongside limited content

analysis as described in the text. Our intent has been to be inclusive and acknowledge and identify the role of all media producers, well beyond those considered traditional journalism, such that the analysis provides the best understanding possible of the Seattle information community. To that end, we have also attempted to calculate the number of journalists working in the city, an undertaking fraught with multiple complications. First, it should be noted that our calculations of working journalists may include unpaid reporters, particularly those contributing to Internet media. Second, our research sought those listed on outlets' websites as staff contributors in editorial roles; such calculations may exclude freelance contributors and may include others who are not explicitly involved in newsgathering.

A version 1.0 and soon after a version 1.1 of this analysis were developed in May 2010. This version 2.1 is similarly considered only our latest understanding rather than a final version. We welcome further input: Please email mediapolicy@newamerica.net if you have additional information we should include or believe we've made an error in our analysis.

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music. CFUN 1410 AM (SA) - Not a Seattle station, it's in Vancouver, BC, Canada, but you can actually pick up their signal at night. They also have Streaming Audio. Talk radio. Dr. Laura, Dr. Joy Browne, Coast To Coast AM.

Seattle FM Radio Stations: KBSG 97.3 FM - "Good Times. Great Oldies". Oldies music.

KCMS 105.3 FM (SA) - "Seattle's Family Friendly Radio Station". Christian music., KEXP (formerly KCMU) 90.3 FM (SA) - "Where The Music Matters". UW student run radio. Live and archived streaming music. An innovative, eclectic mix of alternative rock, hip hop, electronic, roots & blues, world & reggae, jazz, and more. KGRG 89.9 FM (SA) - Today's Rock. Local music. Punk, Progressive, Alternative Rock, Underground Hip-Hip. KING 98.1 FM (SA) - Classical music. Live streaming audio. KISS 106.1 FM - "#1 For All The Hits". Rock music. KISW 99.9 FM - Popular rock. Howard Stern. The KISW Rock Girls. KJR 95.7 FM (SA) - "SuperHits of the 60s & 70s". KLSY 92.5 FM - "The Best MIX Of The 80s, 90s & Now!" Contemporary popular music. KMPS 94.1 FM - Seattle's #1 country music station. Ichabod Caine. KMTT 103.7 FM - "The Mountain". Adult alternative music. KNDD 107.7 FM - "The End". Alternative rock. Loveline with Adam Carolla and Dr. Drew. KPLU 88.5 FM (SA) - "NPR News And All That Jazz". "World Class Jazz". Live streaming audio. KPLZ 101.5 FM - "STAR 101.5". Today's hits. Kent & Alan. KQBZ 100.7 FM - "The BUZZ". Talk radio. Robin & Maynard, BJ Shea, Phil Hendrie, Tom Leykis (Live Streaming), Kim Komando, Rhona At Night, Shaken Not Stirred. KRWM 106.9 FM - "Warm 106.9". Soft favorites. KSER 90.7 FM (SA) - Not heard in Seattle, as the station is in Everett, but their terrific Eclectic World Music can be heard on Streaming Audio. Worth a listen. KUBE 93.3 FM - "Seattle's #1 Hit Music Station". Hit music. T-Man. Nighttime Playaz. KUOW 94.9 FM (SA) - "Puget Sound Public Radio". NPR programming. Morning Edition. All Things Considered. A Prairie Home Companion. Live streaming audio. Streaming Archives. KWJZ 98.9 FM - "Smooth Jazz". KYPT 96.5 FM - "The Point". The 80s & more. KZOK 102.5 FM - "Seattle's Only Classic Rock Station". (From http://www.therainiervalley.com/radio_web_sites.html) Accessed May 6, 2010.

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