

Greetings Committee Members,

I am conducting a first of its kind PhD research into the community television industry in Australia. My interest in this industry deals with the ever increasing commercialism of their practices, which will eventually lead to the total disregard of community broadcasting philosophy. From my perspective, it has already developed into the similar media industry advocates argued were not meeting the public's needs, and had none to little local programming. I fully understand that they have to survive on their own because of no federal funding, but I also personally feel that better planning and partnership could have been developed prior to seeking the use of the sixth channel broadcasting licenses that could have served the public better and not develop what I consider to be a poor version of a commercial television service.

I come from the U.S. where there is a clear distinction between "Commercial", "Public", "Institutional" and "Community" broadcasting in all sectors, may they be television, radio or print. Not receiving government financial support is no reason to just take on a project in hopes that the federal government will come to the rescue. This is what seems to be happening, because the community broadcasting sector is continually asking for more, if not direct government funding. I say, meet the philosophical standards of what community broadcasting is all about, and maybe, and I mean maybe you might receive some of the "public's" money.

During my research, I have found several areas of concern which I feel needs to be addressed prior to community television continuing on their present course. I recently ran across a document printed on the below website:

http://www.comunit.info/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=671&Itemid=51, titled "Vision for Community Use of Digital Television Spectrum" dated 30 June 2006, where community television industry operatives presented their plans for the future of their industry if allowed digital spectrum. My concerns lay in the following areas of what they are proposing to develop once on the digital spectrum. I address the issues presented on their future plans as follows:

A full digital channel for community use will connect Australia's communities, education sector, cultural institutions and independent producers with new audiences and stimulate programming innovation:

1. Dedicated channels for specific communities, for instance an Indigenous channel
2. Local programs, entertainment and information
3. A space for independent digital media production, both professional and amateur
4. On-demand information relating to group activities (membership, donation forms, fact sheets), building a multiplatform presence for civil society organisations
5. Educational courseware with related content
6. An entry-point to cultural archives and collections
7. Access to government information and local issues, including programs that allow for citizen input into national debate.

My Perspective

1. What do they mean about dedicating channels for specific communities? Doesn't SBS already have multicultural programming?
2. If community television stations were already doing their job, wouldn't they already have more local programs, entertainment and information produced by local community members and producers?
3. A space for independent digital media productions has always been what ever venue a producer chooses, and when they choose a presentation venue to promote their production, they are looking to recoup production funds spent on their projects. Overall, the majority of any independent media being produced is normally in the form of a film production where the producer intends to promote it in film festivals and not local community television stations. However, I can see community television stations playing a part in having the producer on air during a local media development program not that would definitely be beneficial to an artist who already spent hard earned funds to develop their productions.
4. On-demand information relating to group activities is just another way of saying, we will have more space available then we know what to do with, so we will fill it with community notices that we can already bring you during our regular broadcast times.
5. If seriously reviewed, when the licenses were first offered to the educational system, they had no interest or were not ready for the use of the sixth channel, and if we look today, they are not breaking down the doors of community television stations seeking air time for any educational development, nor will this exist with any technical training schools. This area of broadcasting needs to be properly reviewed and established by the educational system and not by community television operatives that in most cases have management and operators who don't have the proper credentials to fully understand broadcasting or educational requirements.
6. What is meant by an entry-point to cultural archives and collections, I couldn't tell you. Maybe we should leave this area to the federal, state and city organizations that are properly trained to maintain historical artefacts.
7. If I recall from a submission I sent to the ACMA in 2006 on the use of the remaining two digital channels on free to air, I recommended that a channel be dedicated for this purpose of government, state and city council procedures and public comment with government officials. This is a good point, but I feel that this should also be properly reviewed and operated by professionals who would know how to connect all of the federal, state and city proceedings where they can all be broadcasted on a national scale along with separating the broadcasts when it deals with more local content.

I am a true advocate for community media, but also believe that if an industry says it stands for something and then it goes a different direction then intended then it is time for reform.

If the committee can see my points I am raising to the future of community television in Australia, then I believe these issues should be presented to the operatives of this industry and especially inform the public to what is being considered by this industry. Another point to consider is how will community television accomplish all of these new tasks if they are already financially strapped? Where do they intend to get their funding from? The federal government, or increased advertisement dollars?

Sincerely,

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