

## Executive Summary: The Public Service Publisher Initiative

The **Public Service Publisher** (PSP) initiative is a *process* through which public broadcasters can identify a workable, system-wide strategy to meet three emerging needs:

- The need to provide, in a simple and usable way, content to a growing audience of listeners and viewers who are adopting on-demand technologies, including streaming, TiVo, RSS, iPods, *et al.*
- The need to distribute public service content through a system that optimizes online search results, thus reaching new users and expanding the impact of existing programs.
- The need to develop revenue streams based on new media applications that can expand and sustain new service without undermining current system revenues.

This concept was developed by a group of public broadcasting executives, independent producers and “outside” colleagues. Much of the inspiration came from two sources: first, a groundbreaking paper, *Public Radio Online* (PRO) by Stephen Hill, and second, an innovative RFP process initiated in the UK, where a government agency solicited proposals to develop a new digital delivery service for public service programming. The PRO paper proposed creation of a web-interface and related infrastructure to provide access to *all* public radio content online (national and local streams, archives, and web-only features). It proposed that all traffic to the service would come through *station sites*, and suggested a *tiered service* in which some content would be free, while other service levels would be offered for a fee (either a monthly subscription or one-time charges). Producers, stations and networks would share this revenue through formulas that reflected actual use of content and traffic delivered to the service.

In December 2004, an *ad hoc* group of 14 executives – organized by Mark Fuerst, Dennis Haarsager, Hill and Steve Rathe – met in Chicago to discuss these concepts. The organizers felt it was important to create an inclusive process in which the interests of stations and producers could be identified and reconciled with the other public broadcasting interests.

The meeting succeeded. Over ten hours, the participants enlarged and refined the PRO concept to include public TV and 3<sup>rd</sup> party partner content. Guided by new CPB research, they placed a high priority on reaching fringe and non-public broadcasting users. They embraced the RFP approach and tailored it to the requirements of U.S. public broadcasting. They reached consensus on the following points:

- There is an urgent need to provide on-demand service to a growing audience of new media users.
- Reaching this audience will require a system-wide strategy. Efforts by individual stations, producers or networks will not provide a critical mass of content, be less competitive, and less likely to be sustainable.
- Various forms of paid content should be explored as sources of new revenue, supplementing existing sources such as underwriting.
- The PSP should be configured to respect and preserve existing brands; nonetheless, the group found compelling reasons why a PSP service should be offered *both* through existing participant web sites *and* through a freestanding web portal – a public service media mall.
- The PSP would offer producers a powerful way to attract and serve new users—without closing off other distribution options that those producers may also wish to exploit.
- By aggregating public radio stations’ online program schedules, the PSP could enable “TiVo-like” functionality for public radio, allowing listeners on-demand replay capacity for all broadcast programming while maintaining branding.
- The PSP would allow uniform and user-friendly new media access to U.S. public broadcasters’ content on a worldwide scale, under terms determined and controlled by those broadcasters.
- The technical and marketing requirements of a PSP extend beyond the scope of any existing organization; so in creating a PSP service, system leaders should consider a range of organizational forms, such as combining existing services, forming a new operating organization, or outsourcing some operating requirements to existing non-profit or commercial entities.

The group agreed to launch a planning process over two-months, beginning with the distribution of a Request for Preliminary Proposals. Comments and responses are being collected through mid-February. Additionally, they presented their ideas at the IMA Conference in San Francisco on January 27 and 28 and then with the public broadcasting community at large. They will also meet with potential respondents to the RFPP. And finally, they will contact potential funders to solicit advice and support.