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Proposal for Community Media Development Initiatives

Summary / Cover Letter:

The day of public-access TV stations is over. Only a few years ago, centralized production studios with expensive equipment and access to the local cable network seemed to be the best way of empowering citizens to have their voices heard in the greater public forum. Today, thanks to new low-cost equipment and the leveling effect of the internet, almost everyone can reach almost everyone else in almost any media they like. Anyone with basic internet access can write a blog, post a tweet, share a podcast or upload a video. Thanks to social networking and mobile internet-ready devices, all of this content can be shared and commented upon by almost everyone almost everywhere.

On the local level, however, this constant stream of often locally relevant information can seem more like the gush of a fire hose. It's far too much content for anyone — even the most impassioned citizen — to follow, digest and retain.

For the past several months, Xpress has been working on an idea that will take this flood of local content and turn it into something more like a community reservoir. Using both existing and new information-gathering tools, we'll be making a central resource for everyone with an interest in our community to share. We'll do this by sorting, collecting and connecting locally relevant online content of all kinds, and presenting the results in an easily searchable, sharable, visually enjoyable way.

This is no mere aggregator of content. Far from being just the audience, our users will be the content creators and organizers on all levels. Think of all of the best online tools (sharing, rating, tagging, commenting) applied to the best ideas from today's most reader-friendly internet sites. Deeply location-based and highly local in a way that monolithic and globe-encompassng web sites like Google and Facebook could never afford to be. Our project will allow users to: follow, post and curate breaking news about a fire in Kenilworth; search restaurants' lunch specials within a few hundred yards of their current location, and recommend today's dish to their community; and post a video resume in reply to a want ad for a job in Montford.

One of the key features of our system is the ability to provide a personalized view of content to users. Users can save personalized channels of content based upon their own interests, and they can also follow the activity and interests of their friends and their neighbors.

Patrick Conant, *Mountain Xpress* Web Director

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a) Budget:
1. Year 1:
    a. **Income:**
        i. Grant Income ($60,000)
        ii. No additional income expected in Year 1
        iii. **Total: $60,000**
    b. **Expenses:**
        i. Initial Development Personnel (1,280 hours * $30 / hr = $38,400**)**
        ii. Continued Development Personnel (360 hours * $30 / hr = $10,800**)**
        iii. Audio and Video Equipment, Web Services, Supplies ($7,200)
        iv. **Total: $56,400**
2. Year 2:
    a. **Income:**
        i. Web Advertising ($1,200)
        ii. Sponsorships ($2,400)
        iii. Business Promoted Listings ($600)
        iv. Grant Income ($40,000)
        v. **Total: $44,200**
    b. **Expenses:**
        i. Continued Development Personnel (1,040 hours * $30 / hr = $31,200)
        ii. Audio and Video Equipment, Web Services, Supplies ($12,400)
        iii. **Total: $43,600**
3. Year 3:
    a. **Income:**
        i. Web Advertising ($6,000)
        ii. Sponsorships ($6,000)
        iii. Business Promoted Listings ($6,000)
        iv. Grant Income: $20,000
        v. **Total: $38,000**
    b. **Expenses:**
        i. Continued Development Personnel (1,040 hours * $30 / hr = $31,200)
        ii. Audio and Video Equipment, Web Services, Supplies ($6,800)
        iii. **Total: $38,000**

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b) Major Project Activities:

Development will be performed in-house at Mountain Xpress under the direction of the Web Director. Mountain Xpress will hire additional personnel to design, develop and maintain the system as needed. We will develop a complete Web-based application that utilizes open source technologies and frameworks where feasible. The application will be supported by a redundant cloud-based server platform for both web application and data resources.

We propose an initial development process that will create a functional, publicly available product within 24 weeks.

c) Outcomes and Measurements:

The proposed system will allow residents and visitors of Asheville to experience, contribute to and organize/curate aggregated content of various types on a single online portal. Users of the system will be able to use their existing social media connections, geographic location and topical interests to create a personalized view of content within the system. Users will be able to interact with content in ways that break the limitations imposed by each individual platform and encourage discussions that transcend individual pieces of content.

We will measure the success of the system directly by using freely available web-analytics software to track usage and activity on the website. We will encourage public feedback and evaluate user response to determine future development priorities.

d) Schedule:

We propose an initial development schedule of 24 weeks, to begin 30 days after the acceptance of this proposal to allow resources and personnel to be appropriately allocated. We will launch a feature complete, initial version of the product at the end of the 24-week development. After this initial development period, we will devote a fixed level or resources to continually maintain and enhance the product.

e) Partners:

The project envisions all residents, local businesses and area visitors as collaborators — both as content generators and content organizers. In addition to this, we will partner with local educational institutions and nonprofit groups to encourage technically minded individuals to actively participate in the development on the system. Specifically, we are interested in developing a program for students or interested community members to apply their Computer Science or Multimedia Design skills to this project.

f) The Target Community:

The proposed system will serve Asheville/Buncombe residents, visitors and businesses. Residents

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of Asheville/Buncombe will gain a powerful new platform to distribute, annotate, organize and consume content created and aggregated by their fellow citizens. Visitors to Asheville/Buncombe will gain a comprehensive view into the creativity and spirit of the area. Visitors will gain an additional platform to share their experiences with locals. Local businesses will be able to promote themselves using the system, by directly connecting with potential customers by posting deals and promotions, such as their daily food and drink specials, as well as link their account to existing social media accounts on Facebook and Twitter. Any local business will be able to create an account within the system by completing a simple registration and verification process.

g) Communications:

Our system will be aggressively distributed using existing online channels. In addition to a traditional website designed for desktop web browsers, we will also develop a full-featured interface for mobile and tablet devices. In the future, we plan to explore innovative distribution methods that will allow users to interacts with the system on street-level kiosks, as well as real-world "bridges" such as QR codes. *Mountain Xpress* will provide additional support through existing print and online products.

h) Documentation:

Before we begin active development of the project, we will create and maintain proper documentation outlining the functional specifications and data structures necessary for the system we have proposed. We will set goals for web traffic and user interaction, and we will make all of these metrics publicly available.