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**About The Media Consortium**

The Media Consortium "...echoes the low-cost, high-reward forms of online organizing that liberal groups excelled at in the 2008 election," wrote Harvard University's Neiman Journalism Lab in a July 2009 article about the network. We are a network of over 40 national, leading independent media outlets. Visit [www.themediaconsortium.org](http://www.themediaconsortium.org) for more information on our background and a list of our members.

Mission and strategic principles of The Media Consortium

Our mission is to amplify independent media’s voice; increase our collective clout; leverage our current audience and reach new ones. We believe it is possible and necessary to seize the current moment and change the debate in this country. We will accomplish this mission by fulfilling our five strategic principles.

* Foster Collaboration and Coordination
* Build and Diversify Media Leadership
* Focus on Audience Development
* Bring Money and Attention into the Sector
* Support Innovation in Journalism and Business Models

**Editorial Projects**

Follow The Money

With the support of The Arca Foundation, The Media Consortium hosted an **economic strategy retreat** in April 2009 that examined how independent media could provide deep, meaningful coverage of the current financial crisis and long-term economic issues. The Media Consortium invited a cross-section of policy experts, political and financial insiders, grassroots advocates, media watchdogs and independent media producers to the event. The meeting was a huge success, resulting in critical information sharing, new connections and, last but not least, deep brainstorming on how to strengthen independent media’s reporting around the economy. Immediate editorial results came shortly after the event, including several articles that ran in *Mother Jones*, the *Nation* and the Washington Independent, plus a video series that ran on GritTV. In January 2010, Kevin Drum wrote investigative report *Capital City*, for Mother Jones which details the overwhelming influence of the banking lobby on our economic policy. Kevin wrote to Tracy Van Slyke of The Media Consortium that the article came largely from the information shared at the economic retreat.

The meeting also became the basis for an editorial collaboration around economic issues developed by a small group of TMC members called **“Follow The Money.”** In October 2009, The Media Consortium convened a meeting of eight independent journalism organizations to discuss organizing a collaborative reporting project that would take our work on the economy to far greater scale and impact. This meeting marked the first time that a group of independent media makers came together to design a multi-organizational, long-term editorial collaboration that links the best reporting models, cutting edge communication strategies and a focus on engaging current and new audiences to directly impact policy.

Follow The Money has five organizing elements:

\* **Dramatically scaled up reporting and analysis on the economy:** Follow The Money will field a “virtual newsroom” of experienced, full-time journalists, assigned to our respective organizations but wired together to maximize opportunities for team reporting.

\* **Reporting with impact:** Follow The Money will build a shared media training, outreach, and public relations team to effectively communicate our work to policy-makers and media influentials in New York and Washington.

\* **Accountability journalism:** *Follow The Money* will fill the gap left by commercial media, delivering broad and deep investigative journalism on the institutions and individuals that shape decision-making and policies on Wall Street and in Washington. We’ll also investigate the people whose decisions led us to the crisis, and use all the tools of pop/digital culture (think Gawker with footnotes) to expose a culture of greed and hyper-individualism to a wide audience.

\* **The bigger picture:** What’s really going on? *Follow The Money* will connect policy makers on high with on-the-ground stories of both economic suffering and creative responses to the crisis. With innovative packaging of reported material for multiple media platforms and creative and coordinated release strategies, we can significantly open up coverage from the narrow horse-race coverage norm.

 \* **A big (and boisterous) platform for smart ideas**: There is a rich network of thinkers, economists, entrepreneurs, political leaders, and organizations that offers dramatically contrasting points of view on how to create a healthy economy that works for all, but they are mostly absent from the largest media platforms and marginalized in the debate. We want to fix that by providing a robust platform for their perspectives, ideas and possible solutions.

**Independent Media Internships**

The Media Consortium is committed to creating and sustaining initiatives that recruit the next generation of media producers from a wide variety of cultural and economic backgrounds. We are working to increase media diversity within organizations and move a young, diverse set of media makers affiliated with TMC members into the mainstream.

The consortium launched its **Independent Media Internships** program in May 2009 with five talented young media makers selected from a pool of 190 applicants. These interns were placed with MC member organizations for a three-month, full-time, paid editorial internship. MC staff worked hard to recruit a diverse set of young people. Four of the five Summer 2009 interns are female; three are bilingual; two are of Hispanic descent; one is of Native American descent.

After only a few weeks of work, one intern authored a groundbreaking report on the impact of the recession on ethnic media, which garnered the 4th highest page views of all time for ColorLines.com. Another intern made the front page of the Huffington Post with a blog on the role of Twitter in the Iranian election protests. Five interns were placed in September 2009 and interns for Spring 2010 are being placed.

**MediaWires**

With our **Media Wires project**, the consortium is delivering our members’ reporting on the economy, the environment, health care and immigration to new audiences using a variety of social media tools and external partnerships with non-profits and other news sites.

All Media Consortium member content (articles, video, audio) related to the economy, environment, health care and immigration is aggregated on our hub sites: The Audit, The Mulch, The Pulse and The Diaspora. (See [www.themediaconsortium.org](http://www.themediaconsortium.org)). Each wire has its own dedicated page that includes blogs, a running list of articles from all TMC members on that topic, widgets for any organization to embed, and more.

Our bloggers sift through this content and provide savvy round-ups of the best/most interesting content generated by Media Consortium members every week. The blogs are cross-posted throughout the blogosphere and available for any organization, TMC member or other news site to use.

The Media Wires project delivers between 75,000 and 85,000 new visitors to MC member content every month, and the numbers keep growing. Consortium staff will continue to actively cultivate new partnerships to increase the branding, recognition and impact of our members’ journalism in 2010.

**Live From Main Street**

In 2006, representatives from *Mother Jones*, *The Nation* and Air America identified the potential for meet a deep need for journalism that engaged the American public by linking national issues and policies to everyday life. The 2008 election season was identified as a prime opportunity for independent media to work together to impact the political dialogue.

The resulting collaboration became Live From Main Street (LFMS) and was launched as a flagship project of The Media Consortium in 2008. LFMS became a grassroots-focused town hall tour of America, hosted by GRITtv's Laura Flanders, and facilitated by an unprecedented alliance of independent media makers and regional, grassroots activist organizations.

**LFMS ultimately reached over 9 million people via a five part town hall series and accompanying content.** The tremendous reach of this project fulfilled our central mission of putting the voices of every day people, local leaders front and center during this election season. We took issues underrepresented by corporate media mainstream by connecting the local impact of national trends and letting a diversity of voices tell their own stories. LFMS staff and crew worked with the people and locations ignored by mainstream media by working with up-and-coming experts and leaders on key national, political and social issues.

**Invaluable new partnerships were formed**, demonstrating our collective ability to work together on future projects, big and small. MC Members, including Free Speech TV, Link TV, the National Radio Project, Public News Service, OneWorld, AlterNet, the American News Project and Brave New Films, Mother Jones, NAMAC, The Nation, The UpTake and Yes! Magazine participated on multiple levels, and by doing so, expanded the scope of this project, reaching new audiences and utilizing different mediums.

*"[The UpTake saw a] rise in viewership from carrying show live, [and] networking with media allies."*

*-Noah Kunin, Senior Political Correspondent for The UpTake*

*"This was a perfect match for how we wanted to cover the election. We just don’t have enough people on the ground to get that coverage."*

*-Geraldine Cahill, Communications and Social Media Director for The Real News*

Editorial collaborations were also key to building the impact of LFMS. In July 2008, the LFMS team kicked off "Housing Crisis Investigation Week," a multimedia initiative designed to amplify coverage and conversation around this issue in coordination with the Miami town hall, "Magic City, Hard Times: How is Miami Facing the Economic Crisis and Working Toward a Sustainable Future?" Media Consortium members created a flood of high-quality, independent media exposure to the housing crisis that broke into mainstream media, with coverage in the *Miami Herald* and local television affiliates. Guests featured in LFMS Miami have gone on to be covered by NPR, the *New York Times* and other large media outlets.

*Content highlights include:*

* In "Housing Crisis Hits 2 Million U.S. Children," OneWorld's Caitlin Johnson documents the impact of the housing crisis on our nation's most vulnerable citizens.
* Retired Wall Streeter and *Mother Jones* writer Nomi Prins explained how congress went wrong in "Why the Economy Went South."
* Over at The Nation, Peter Rothberg blogged about H.R. 2061, the Predatory Mortgage Lending Practices Reduction Act.
* GRITtv honed in on the crisis with several special guests and experts in the housing field.
* LFMS Miami participants Gihan Perera, Co-founder and Executive Director of the Miami Workers Center and Max Rameau, Founder and Author of Take Back The Land released open-source blogs about housing in Miami, which were picked up by MC members and allies like Huffington Post.
* Adele Stan, former managing editor of The Media Consortium's syndicated reporting project, examined how Miami—known as the subprime disaster's "ground zero"—became a window for larger national issues and was republished in outlets like AlterNet and *In These Times*.

**Business Projects**

**Online Advertising Network**

While many independent media outlets are building out their online advertising capacity, these changes can be costly to implement, technologically difficult, and due to the smaller web presence of some organizations, do not offer guaranteed returns on such a hefty investment. Successful web advertising strategies do have the potential to generate significant amounts of income, however the field is often difficult to parse and even harder to navigate. The solution? Build an advertising network that pools the collective inventories of Consortium members to make a highly marketable package.

In February 2008, The Media Consortium hired the consulting firm MarkeTchnique to explore opportunities in building an online ad network for progressive media outlets. MarkeTechnique and Media Consortium staff interviewed 10 MC members around their current advertising platforms, needs, and revenue opportunities. The Media Consortium also conducted a survey of the entire network, assessing the interest and viability of forming an online advertising network. Results included:

* 26 organizations have a total of 4,549,753 unique visitors and 55,776,186 pageviews per month.
* 24 organizations have email products that go out around once a week, reaching approximately 1,002,671 names. Of those 26 respondents, 12 offer ads on their email products.
* 12 respondents currently offer ads on their websites and three to four are interested in incorporating them.

During this time, MarkeTechnique surveyed the larger online advertising space and evaluated both the viability of a Media Consortium ad network and what would be needed to build it. MarkeTechnique created a presentation and report around the current online advertising sector and implications for Media Consortium members at the May Meeting.

Armed with this information, we determined that there was a potential significant opportunity for The Media Consortium to help members move into the online advertising network space. Also noted was that certain Media Consortium members needed support in developing their online ad sales strategies. Media Consortium members AlterNet, Air America, *Mother Jones* and *The Nation* came together as the founding outlets for a progressive media ad network. MarkeTechnique and Media Consortium staff continued to work with the Consortium and the ad network's founding members through July. These four Media Consortium members are now advancing Ad Progress. This is a great milestone—we are so excited to be empowering our members to take lead on projects that benefit the whole, not just one organization.

**List Analysis and Audience Building**

In 2006, 16 of the Consortium’s then-32 members agreed to pour their various lists – subscribers, donors, registered online users, newsletter subscribers, and so on – into a single file. An outside company then cleaned (“de-duped”) the file, ran a series of demographic overlays on the data, and reported back to the Consortium at our most recent meeting in Los Angeles. What we learned was that:

* These 16 organizations had a combined file size of 2.9 million names (about the same size as MoveOn.org’s file): 1.8 million confirmed regular mail names, and 1.1 million confirmed email addresses.
* Only 1 in 4 names on the original list is shared between two or more organizations – to put it another way, 75% of the original list is served by only one media outlet.
* While most of this audience is concentrated on the West Coast and the Northeast/Mid-Atlantic corridor, the “penetration rate” for these sixteen groups into key portions of the Upper Midwest, Rocky Mountain West, Southwest and Deep South was higher than expected.
* Racial and ethnic distribution and income distribution of this audience roughly approximates the U.S. distribution of population.

The implications of the file size alone are significant. We can reasonably estimate that the confirmable audience – that is, the portion of the audience for which we have actual contact information – is probably in the 4 million to 5 million range. This is just the heartwood of the audience tree: The actual audience for Media Consortium members is without question much larger.

* Magazines like those involved with the Consortium have a “pass-along” rate for their issues of between 1.5 and 3 people, i.e., on average, this many additional people will read the magazine issue before it’s recycled.
* Website unique visitors far exceed the number of registered users, in *Mother Jones’* case for example, by a factor of about 5.
* Multipliers for television viewers and radio listeners are even higher; research conducted for LinkTV, for instance, indicates that some 5 million people tune into LinkTV at least an hour a week.

**Even if we heavily discount these non-confirmable numbers, it does not seem unrealistic to estimate that Media Consortium organizations have regular contact with at least 10 million people. By way of comparison in 2005, the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press polling data suggested that 27 million people (19%) of registered voters considered themselves “liberals” (out of some 60 million who voted for John Kerry in 2004).**

In 2009, The Media Consortium worked with Catalist to explore additional list-building opportunities for our members. Catalist houses one of the most comprehensive databases of 250 million voter-aged in the country. In 2009, Catalist worked with 15 TMC members and provided free modeling analysis that details demographic overlays that compare audiences not only to other Media Consortium outlets, but to the nation as well.

While The Media Consortium’s member organizations ostensibly share common political viewpoints, the media channels are diverse, from websites and magazines to television and radio stations. To leverage common political stances, Catalist built a look-alike model that predicted each individual’s interest in an affiliation with media outlets that have a progressive viewpoint, such as members of The Media Consortium. This model was trained by comparing individuals affiliated with two or more Media Consortium members to a random sample of individuals from the voter file, with the aim of finding characteristics that make those affiliated with Media Consortium organizations distinct from the general population. Using the results from this modeling, Catalist also gave TMC members free access to their demographic database throughout 2009 to help MC members target new subscribers and audiences.

**Supporting Innovation in Journalism and Business Models**
The Big ThawIn October 2009, TMC released our yearlong study on the future of journalism called [***The Big Thaw: Charting a New Future for Journalism***](http://www.themediaconsortium.org/thebigthaw)***.*** It is a comprehensive, definitive examination of how the media landscape has changed and how independent media can boldly lead a new future for journalistic enterprises.

The study was born out of a “game changer” strategy project initiated in 2008 by The Media Consortium to support the evolution of independent media. The Media Consortium commissioned this project because we want to lead our members and other independent media outlets into a new era of sustainable and powerful journalism. TMC staff and The Big Thaw author Tony Deifell interviewed all Media Consortium members, Media Consortium Coordinating Committee members and several outside experts in the fields of media, technology, politics, and financing. These interviews provided perspective on current opportunities, challenges and uncertainties for the sector as well as new possibilities for The Media Consortium and its members to significantly impact and change the landscape.

Four key recommendations for independent media emerged from the study:

1. **Change internally:** By integrating technologists, entrepreneurs and individual media-makers, independent media will cultivate new competencies and strategies to change the journalism field.
2. **Increase experimentation:** Journalism organizations must increase their capacity to innovate with new technology, journalistic practices and business models. They can do this by pursuing “rapid, low-cost innovation” and pooling their experimental efforts. Funders must invest in the long-term sustainability of journalism’s truth-telling by investing in greater experimentation among both new and existing players.
3. **Leverage unique role of a consortium:** The more that independent media-makers leverage their collective power, the more they can negotiate deals, influence public policy and build journalism’s new ecosystem.
4. **Building audiences as communities:** Media organizations must create platforms for users to participate in the journalistic process, work with each other on projects and build their own online communities independent of publishers.

Josh Stearns wrote for Savethenews.org, “*The Big Thaw …* is refreshingly different from every other report published this year. Whereas most reports focus on what went wrong with journalism in America and consider new models and experiments currently under way, *The Big Thaw* delves into the future. … It reads less like a report and more like a travel guide of what’s to come, giving the reader a glimpse at an exciting new landscape.”

Jason Barnett, executive director of The Uptake, wrote, "The problems facing the news industry are complicated and solutions are hard to find. *The Big Thaw* is a comprehensive look into the recent challenges and provides clear ways forward. If you care about the future of media, read every page."

*The Big Thaw* integrates two of our strategic principles: bringing money and attention to the sector and supporting innovation in journalism and business models. TMC is using findings from *The Big Thaw* to structure our Innovation and Incubation Labs, which will launch in 2010.

Incubation and Innovation Lab

The Media Consortium's Innovation and Incubation Lab (II Lab) will focus on helping members experiment with new business, publishing and editorial models that take advantage of the new, web-enabled reader/publisher relationships. Appropriate and effective models will vary depending on the outlet's individual editorial goals, resources and business needs. II lab will allow members to learn from outside experts and trade experiences, information, and ongoing questions with each other. Members will not only discover the best strategies for their organizations, but learn how to implement them—a critical component of ongoing success.

At the end of the lab cycle, participating members will share experiences and lessons learned with MC members and allies, creating a ripple effect of in which education, deployment of practices and evolution of experiments moves outward to benefit the whole independent media sector. Experimentation will lead to successes, sometimes failures that will be lessons for the future, and create space for media outlets to identify and implement a long-term formula for ongoing sustainability and impact that will support their critical journalism.

Cumulatively, these publishing and editorial strands represent a strong and strategic shift for independent media makers to move towards new opportunities that will encourage sustainability, long-term impact for their content, and a healthy transition into 21st century media models. II Lab will implement this strategy in two parts: The first being a “Digital Refresh” workshops with a select group of MC members; the second, small-group labs that support education, collaboration and experimentation around specific business and journalism topics.