**Draft Memo: Re: MediaWires**

This memo contains a proposal to take the MediaWires program offline as of May 6, 2011 and to replace it with a program better able to support and promote our members’ content.

**MediaWires to Date**

The MediaWires are a set of four weekly blogs and headline feeds that spotlight content from TMC members pertaining to key political issues. The blogs are written by paid bloggers and managed by TMC staff. Current blogs include the Mulch, the Audit, the Pulse, and the Diaspora. (The Wavelength is funded through Media Policy Reporting and Education Pilot Project (MPREPP) program and appears biweekly) The MediaWires have been funded via TMC general operating funds.

The Wavelength is designed to promote and leverage media policy-related content and will continue to run as long MPREPP is funded. Funding for the “MediaWires” proper will run out as of June 31, 2011.

**Changing Trends**

In summer of 2010, the MediaWires were reprinted by 35 organizations, including blogging communities, TMC members, advocacy groups and non-profits, with an aggregate audience of approximately 7.5 million people. While tracking actual pageviews was a problem, we were able to extrapolate an estimated 1.5 million pageviews per quarter based on reporting obtained from a small sample of partner organizations.

Over the last six months, however, there has been a decreased investment in the program from external partners, and trends regarding community blogging and aggregation are on the decline. Non-profit organizations are beginning to generate their own content, which is reducing demand for the blogs and headline feeds.

* Three of our regular partners have shuttered their community blogs, and the 35 regular blog republishers have dwindled to approximately 15, the majority of whom are TMC members.
* We’ve gone from 17 installed widgets featuring TMC member headlines to 7.
* The blogs are generating approx 6,100 clickthroughs to TMC member content each month, which is down from approx 10,000/month generated last summer.

**What’s Working?**

The MediaWires are doing well on the social media front. The Media Consortium fan page on Facebook continues to grow and has over 1800 users, up from 1200 in August 2010. We have over 2900 combined followers on Twitter, up from 1677 in August 2010. We also piloted 5 short video spotlights of members' content last fall, which have accrued 1325 views.

The program is a good entry point for potential allies, partners, and new TMC members. It also has served as a solid primer for crafting content collaborations as we’ve seen with Campaign Cash, the Media Policy Reporting and Education Pilot Program, and Wisconsin.

**Meeting Our Goals**

ADDED SOME CONTEXT HERE. Because the technology and trends supporting the MediaWires program have shifted, TMC staff recommend closing the blogs as of May 6. We will continue with regular programming focused on outreach and exposure of members content. The goals for our future outreach efforts are as follows:

* Highlight and draw attention to TMC member content. Measurement: directly increase pageviews for members, tracking views back to TMC outreach.
* Provide entry point for potential allies, partners and new TMC members: Measurement: track number of allies, partners and members who use the outreach mechanism.
* Enable and enhance content collaborations. Measurement: draw connections between outreach content and new programs.
* Create visibility for TMC programs: solicit member feedback via annual surveys to gauge education level of members with respect to TMC programs.

**Recommendations:**

1. Close down the ongoing MediaWires blogs as of May 6
2. Hire part-time staff to act as the social media voice for TMC at least 5 hours a week, using Facebook, Twitter, etc. Goals for this position include:
3. Draw attention to TMC member content
4. Create visibility for TMC programs
5. Build a Tumblr account to feature notable content from TMC members.
6. Actively encourage TMC allies, partners and members to build buzz for members’ content by following and sharing posts.
7. Maintain blog framework on the TMC website to to kindle collaborations, respond to breaking news, and report on TMC activities.
8. Project and issue-based blogs like The Wavelength and Wisconsin reports will continue
9. TMC Executive Director will post a Monthly Letter every month on TMC blog
10. TMC staff will create blogposts at their discretion to cover industry and breaking news.
11. Create a monthly newsletter primarily for funders and allies. Newsletter will feature Monthly Letter from Executive Director, as well as profiles of members and list of upcoming events (annual meeting, joint fundraiser, etc)
12. Depending on funding, hire PR consultant to enhance our ability to strategically promote member content to various producers, bookers, and syndication services.
13. Depending on funding, create innovation labs on SEO and digital marketing.

**Conclusion**

Digital change happens quickly. TMC needs to follow its own advice and move nimbly with changing technologies. Social media has largely superceded blogs as a means of aggregation and promotion. On the other, blogs and even older technology like email newsletters remain the best tools for conveying larger chunks of information and building loyalty.

TMC must also recognize the limitations of our staff’s expertise and ability to promote content in the larger media landscape. A recent report on Newscloud’s failed attempt to enhance social media for mainstream newspapers focused on these large organizations’ inability to promote and market their content. One focus of TMC fundraising will be to hire a PR consultant for TMC and to create a lab on SEO and digital marketing for members.

As we craft a new program, the goal of TMC staff will continue to be to build the reach and impact of TMC members’ content and encourage cross-pollination of audiences.