

Game Changer Project

The Genesis

We started by asking, “How can we...”

- **Improve** MC’s collective performance by 3x or more in audience reach or influence?
- **Change** prevailing assumptions about progressive media?
- **Attract** new or greater funds?
- **Add** value to relationships among MC members & externally?
- **Take advantage** of changes in media landscape & new platforms?

Actions to Date

1. Identifying key uncertainties for the future

- Online survey of MC members (July '08)
- Interviews with outside thinkers (July '08)

2. Strategic scenario-building — What's around the curve?

- MC Coordinating Committee strategy retreat (NYC, July '08)
- *Scenario-Building Report* (Sept '08)
- *Strategic Moves — Guidelines for Game Changers* (Oct'08)

3. Soliciting *additional* game-changing ideas

- Online survey of MC members & several 1-on-1 conversations (Nov '08)
- Interviews with outside thinkers (Dec '08 – Jan '09)
- Informal salon with outside thinkers (Feb '09)

4. Final outcome:

- Material for MC to host internal conversations about its direction
TMC meeting in Wash D.C. — preliminary results & feedback (Feb '09)
- Final report (Mar '09)
Synthesizing findings for use in speaking with funders and developing shared point of view among MC members

“Game Changer” definition

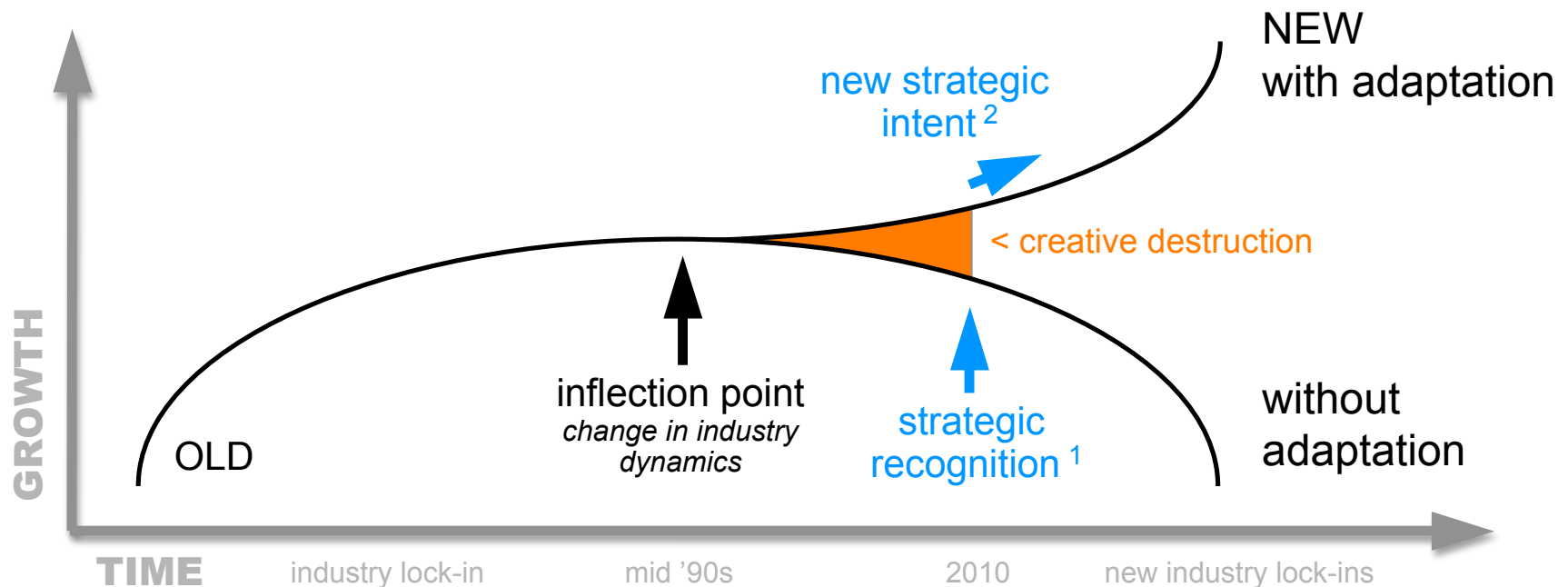
Developments (projects, initiatives, strategies, new models, innovations) that can **"change the game"** for independent media by increasing its impact and influence in the next five years.

These are not incremental strategies, but rather **big bold moves** that The Media Consortium could develop to take advantage of a rapidly changing media landscape.

“No one has been 'caught up in this great upheaval' about the fall of print business model. This change has been more like seeing oncoming glaciers ten miles off, and then deciding not to move.”

– *Clay Shirky*

Strategic Dissonance



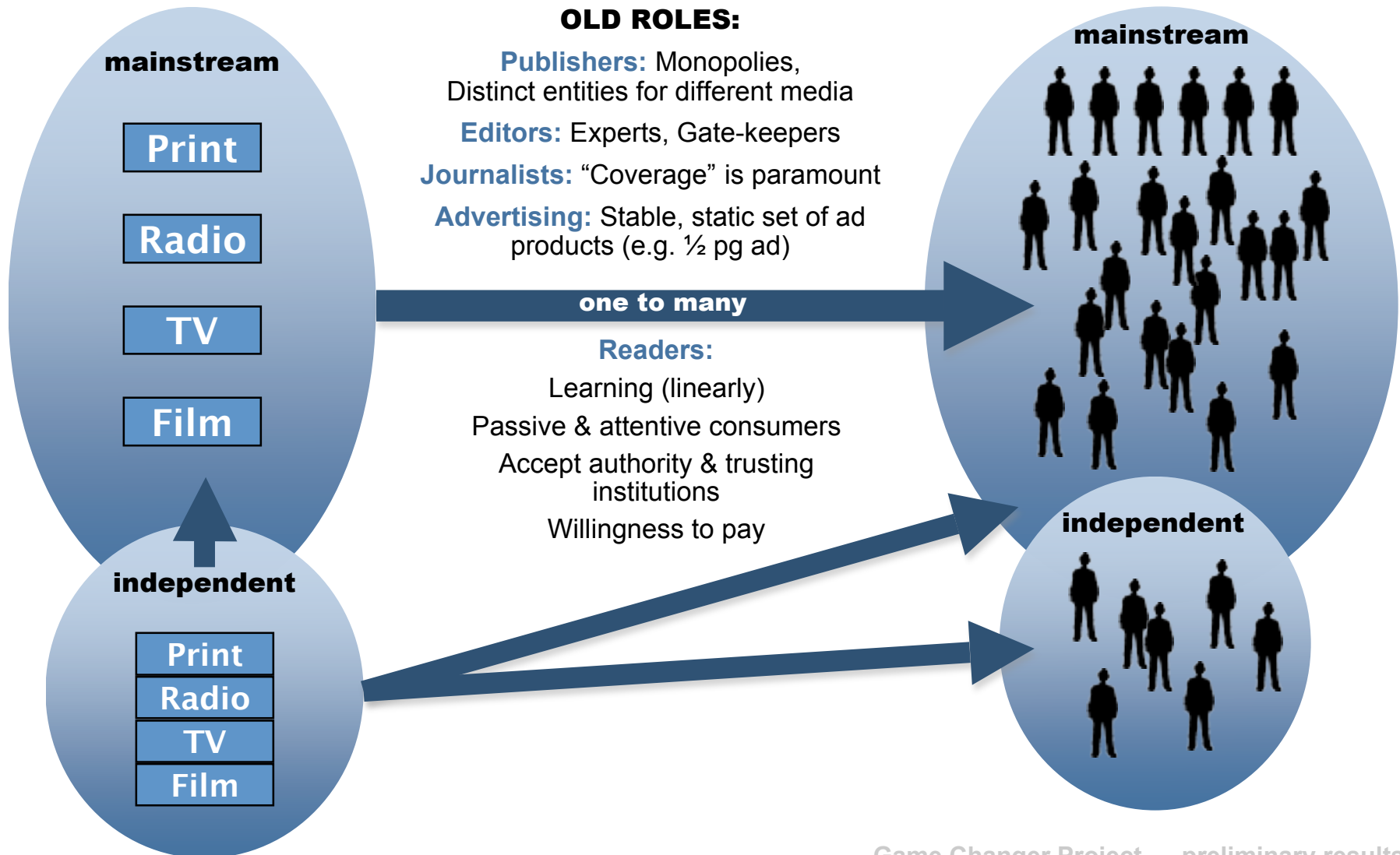
¹ Recognize the strategic importance of emerging practices & approaches **after** they come about but **before** unequivocal environmental feedback is available.

² Create a new *strategic intent* that takes advantage of new industry conditions.

Old Paradigm

Producers/Publishers

Readers/Consumers



Old Paradigm

Expertise & “coverage”

Mainstream — popular ideas

Independent — alternative ideas

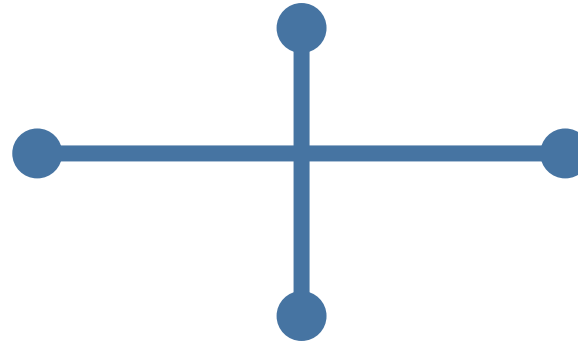
Old Sources of Value

Old Competencies

Teaching & informing people

Highly trained writers

Deep bench
(all under one roof-huge staff/newsroom)



Old Basis of Competition

Stable industry

Scarcity of information

Physical distribution limits

Local, national & regional audiences

Old Models & Metrics

High costs

Key metric — eyeballs

Primary revenue:

Mainstream: subs, ads, class

Indy: major donors/fnds

New Paradigm

Producers/Publishers

- Networked infomediaries & aggregators
- Bundling content
- Creating context / communities
- New role for “experts” (journalists)

Consumers/Users

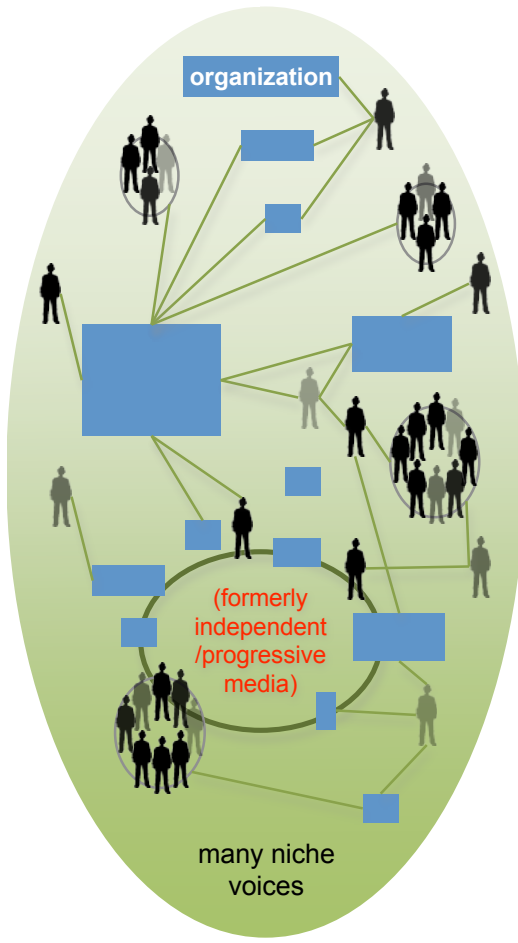
- Networked communities & individuals

Co-producing
Co-sense making
Co-creating community

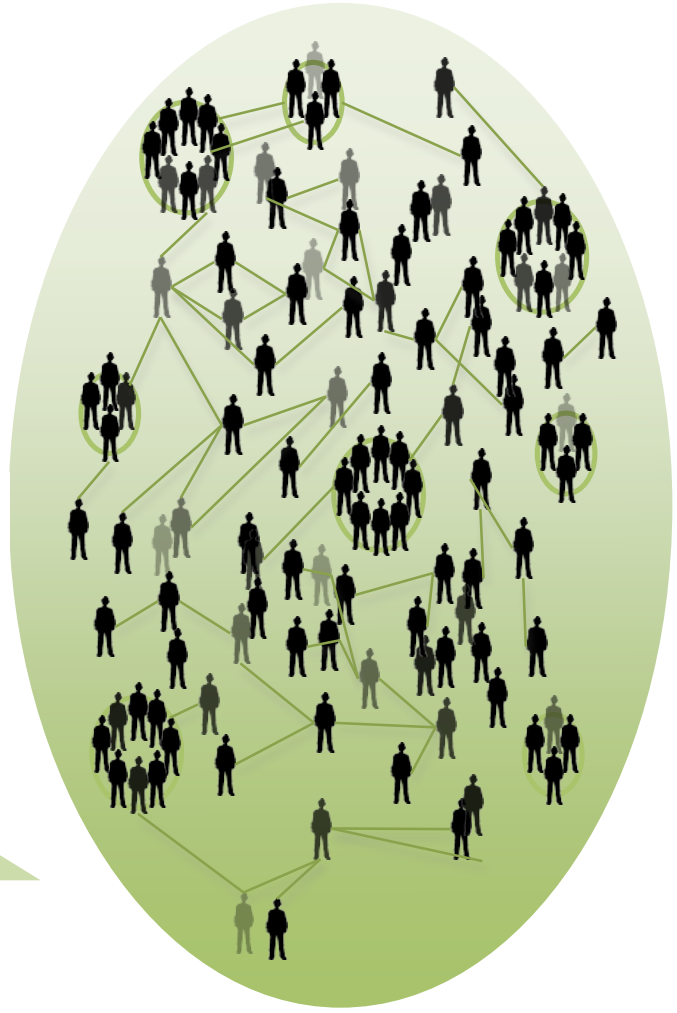
Key strategic choice:
**Compete against or
cooperate with**

**Converged
platforms
& ubiquity**

print/radio/tv/film
computing/moble



no more mainstream



Game Changer Project — preliminary results

New Paradigm

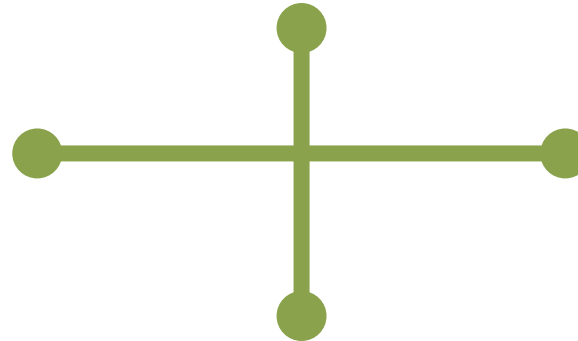
Immediacy & community

“Conceptual Scoops”

new demand for quality journalism

New ways of filtering

New Sources of Value



New Competencies

Engaging people as participants & actors

Breadth & depth of communities/networks

Experimentation
(particularly mobile)

Ease of use/design

Greater understanding of human behavior

New Basis of Competition

Unstable industry

Abundance of info

Scarcity of attention & reputation

No distribution limits

Global audiences

Relevance

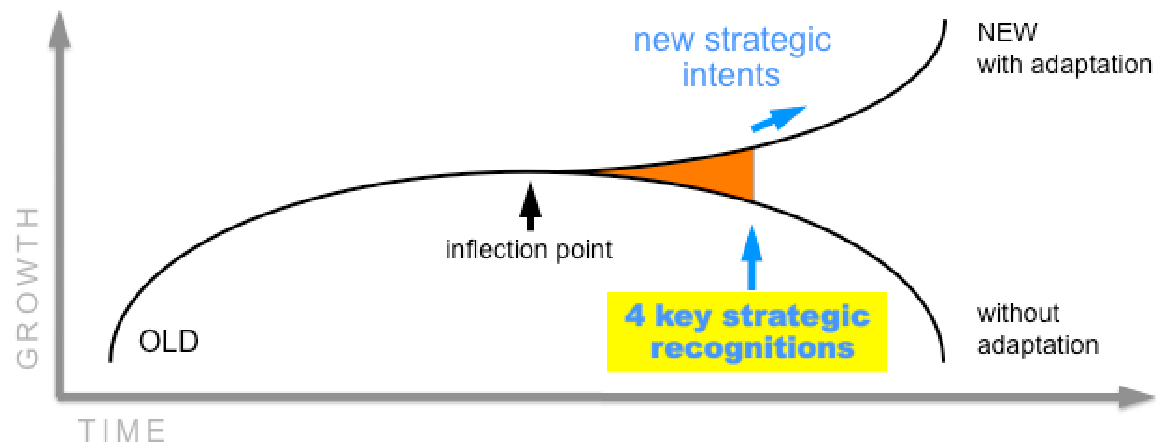
Declining institutional control

New Models & Metrics

“Lean & Mean”

Shift in value chain:
leave chasing eyeballs to other players

Revenue:
greater diversity/mix of sources



New Paradigm

NEW ROLES:

Publishers: Coordinators of community,
creators of platforms

Editors: Curatorial role important
(explicitly & implicitly) – more distributed

Journalists: Facilitating interaction
(creating meaning with new
role of readers)

Readers: Creators, filters, sharers,
collaborators & increasingly
active agents of change

Less consumer affiliations
with publishers (source)

Four Key Shifts

– strategic recognitions from interviews & surveys –

1. Line between mainstream & independent media is blurring.

What are the opportunities?

“I don’t think there will be such a thing as independent media anymore.” (Katrin Verclas)

“Empirically there are so many, many, many, ways for alternative voices to emerge.” (Clay Shirky)

“There is no more ‘mainstream.’” (David Weinberger)

Four Key Shifts

– strategic recognitions from interviews & surveys –

2. The source (publisher) of news isn't as relevant anymore.

Filters (formal, informal, automated & curation) are more relevant.

“We want quality content, but the trend is against going to a single place to find it...” (David Weinberger)

“The Internet has done much to encourage lazy news consumption, while virtually eradicating the meaningful distinctions among newspaper brands.” (Michael Hirschorn, *The Atlantic*)

We're getting away from the idea that a journalist tells a story—it will be that a journalist offers a window for people to create their own meaning. (Amy Gahran)

Four Key Shifts

– strategic recognitions from interviews & surveys –

3. The role of publisher is shifting to include convener and coordinator of audience/user content and connections.

“Publishers need to think of themselves not as publishers, but as community builders.” (Dan Tapscott)

“The future of media for me would be the type of content that I want anytime anywhere on any device. So it’d be coming up with the technology, solutions, and an ecosystems to deliver something like that. All the bounds of time, location, and medium are completely dissolved.” (Ashish Soni)

“The thing to realize is it’s not just enough to have a place where readers talk back— or the classic letters to the editors pattern. Rather it’s about providing a platform for readers to coordinate with on another. That’s a really radical shift because in part because it means you have to take community seriously. The word “membership” has a nice feeling, but what media outlets usually mean by this is: give me money and we’ll give a product or access...The convening power of media organizations, a power they haven’t used because of their model, but the potential is huge.” (Clay Shirky)

Four Key Shifts

– strategic recognitions from interviews & surveys –

4. Alternative thinking no longer fits into the traditional definitions of “progressive” anymore.

What are the implications?

Every person we interviewed from outside MC, stopped us to ask what “independent” and “progressive” meant. It is not a meaningful distinction for the external world.

“I don’t care how it’s framed (e.g. ‘independent’ or ‘progressive’). If it is a good story, I want to read it.”
(John Bracken)

Strategic Recognitions

Chose one of these to discuss in a small group.

Group 1: Line between mainstream & independent media is blurring.

Will the distinctions be meaningful in the future?

Group 2: The source (publisher) of news isn't as relevant anymore.

Filters (formal, informal, automated & curation) are more relevant.

Group 3: The role of publisher is shifting from content creator to convener of communities and coordinating of their content and connections.

Content is no longer as important as coordinating community.

Group 4: Alternative thinking no longer falls on the traditional definitions of "progressive" anymore.

Questions for each small group

If this assumption were true, ...

- A. What notions would we have to give up to move forward?
- B. What capabilities or competencies do we need in order to succeed?
- C. Which models & metrics are most important?

DEBATES OF ASSUMPTIONS ARE WELCOME!

the
media consortium

Strategic Actions

— a few sample ideas from preliminary findings —

What if? ...

1. What if we built a micropayments-platform for use on all TMC sites for **Reader-Supported Journalism**?
2. What if we created the “**MC Innovation Lab**” and focused first on mobile communication and location-based technology?
3. What if we create the “**New Tech Fellowship Program**” to re-tool us to be cutting edge technologist in our work?
4. What if we created an **additional channel** to reach greater scale?
5. What if we created collaborative tools that could significantly reduce costs? (e.g. “**Wikisource**”)
6. What if we created a concerted effort to go **global**?

Strategic Actions

— a few sample ideas from preliminary findings —

What if we built a micropayments-platform for use on all TMC sites for **Reader-Supported Journalism**. [idea from Monika Bauerlein]

Readers would show their support for certain types of reporting by using an “electronic wallet” and making micro-donations.

For example, just like a reader may tag an article on Digg, they could choose to donate 25 cents to a publisher for an investigative piece they appreciate or for a particular reporter they follow.

Design & ease of use would be key for success. In addition, micro-payments create the potential to build a supplementary rating system for content that could create more valuable ratings than a no-cost “thumbs-up” rating, which has less though because there is no skin in the game.

Keys to success:

- Project would have to reach scale to work, so a critical mass of MC members would need to participate.
- Standardizing revenue share agreements & other agreement
- Well designed, easy to use platform that builds in recognition of highest donors for particular individual or stories.
- Campaigns to make readers aware of the new financial product

Strategic Actions

— a few sample ideas from preliminary findings —

What if we created the “**MC Innovation Lab**”—a self-selected, sub-group of members who agree to terms of participation and assign a staff member to participate in trainings, and manage mini-experiments in their orgs.

MC members' perspectives:

Kathy Spillar said “MC has a role to play in bringing members together with experts and innovators in use of new technology/internet and to provide a forum for sharing ideas ... as well, the MC could play a role in attracting capital for investment in our sector for making this transition.”

Linda Jue wrote “This sort of TMC innovation sub-group would develop viable new distribution mechanisms and other technologies to reach wider market and bypass problems with current distribution systems.”

Johanna Vondeling & Ann Friedman suggested “Test piloting — in a relatively contained cluster, small-scale experimentation.”

Outside thinker

“Most organizations that I see have an inability to think about how to use technology strategically. What I mean by that is they’ll do a small experiment – hire an intern and a few people here and there, (exceptions of course) – but there are still a lot of people out there that don’t have the ability to use technology strategically. There is an inability to do what I call rapid low cost innovation. This kind of innovation is important because in these times we don’t know what’ll work and what won’t, all we can do is rapid experimentation and see how the consumer responds.”

~ Ashish Soni

Key activities:

- The Lab’s first focus would be **location-based mobile services**
- Series of one-day workshops to compare results, learn with experts in technology & human-centered design and agree on next experiments
- Learning journeys to tech companies
- MC uses its collective leverage to do deal that gets members in early on new innovations before they take off.

Specific deals: negotiate a deal with Amazon’s Kindle to distribute MC member’s content. Also, TechCrunch said the 7-9” iPod Fall ’09 – a gadget that might actually work well for newspapers.

We can gain first mover advantage on testing and integrating innovations into our organizations. By coordinating early technology adoption across MC members, we will be positioned to take advantage of **Power Law** opportunities.

Strategic Actions

— a few sample ideas from preliminary findings —

What if we created the “New Tech Fellowship Program” that is designed to train & re-tool journalists as leading technology users.

GOAL: to bring capabilities back into their organizations

Outside thinkers

“Just like you always have in any trade you have to learn the craft and the craft now includes tools like Twitter and Google and telling your stories in ways that are native to environments that are circulated by Twitter and Google and others. Getting some fluency in these tools will open up amazing vistas.”
(John Battelle)

Mastering Social Media (which works like *gossip*—a metaphor that journalists haven’t often had to work with or understand)

Key activities:

- Series of one-day workshops over the period of a year to hone skills on latest consumer technology, learn with tech experts in tech & human-centered design
- Learning journeys to tech companies
- Select classes of fellow each year

Key benefits:

- Fellowship programs are a very fundable program for foundations
- This fellowship could be designed to overlap slightly with the “Innovations Lab” idea
- Through this program, MC would increase the speed and agility with which its member organizations can innovate—a significant competitive advantage over big media companies that typically move slowly

Strategic Actions

— a few sample ideas from preliminary findings —

What if created an additional channel to reach greater scale? [Jay Harris]

By saying “additional channel” we mean going into a new market with a new product in order to reach greater scale (e.g. making an MSNBC-type channel in partnership with a current MC member, or collectively.)

Factors to consider (from Jay):

1. As resources get tighter, funders will be looking for ways to do more with the same or fewer resources
2. MC members may have come to the party identified with one particular medium, but we're all multi-media now;
3. There is obvious duplication of resources in some areas and perhaps not enough market development talent in general.

MC members' perspectives:

“I recognize that scale isn't everything and that (per the GBN study, among other places) the New Media world offers many opportunities for influence without scale (I'm thinking of the 'Don't Speak for Me, Sarah Palin' video by the anonymous hockey mom). But it's important to recognize that one significant part of the increased indy media influence of this past year has to do with more and bigger Big and Medium Fish: HuffPo, Keith Olbermann and Rachel Maddow, Tavis Smiley at the big end, but also the sizeable traffic numbers of Alternet, TPM, Color of Change, etc.”

“If we specifically set out to create one or a few additional channels of scale (we'd need to define, and the definitions would depend on target markets), could we do it?” (**Jay Harris**)

Strategic Actions

— a few sample ideas from preliminary findings —

What if we created collaborative tools that would *significantly* cut costs

PROJECT ONE:

“**Wikisource**” (idea from Emily Douglas)

Key activities:

- Have a semi-opened wiki that has a self-organizing system structure.
- Maintains members who are working journalists and who would be required to share and take quid pro quo.
- *One question: how much costs are incurred in sourcing for stories? How much of a savings could result?*

PROJECT TWO:

Any ideas?

MC members' perspectives:

“Better organized crowd-sourcing — if multiple people are reporting one story, putting what they find in one organized source. I'm not sure I like this idea because it takes away from individual ownership (both outlet and writer) for a story. But it might be the way things are going.” (**Emily Douglas**)

Strategic Actions

— a few sample ideas from preliminary findings —

What if created a concerted effort to go global? (Steve Katz)

PROJECT: Build volunteer-run human translation service to translate for greater global reach

MC members' perspectives:

“Organizing ourselves to serve international audiences, which are now looking for high quality info about US politics” (**Steve Katz**)

Outside Thinker:

“A potential game-changing project is Universal Translation Services/Software. How can we help make the world smaller?” (John Bracken)

The Guardian now has more readers in the United States than in the UK

Key Activities:

- Automated translation services on the web are inadequate, and there is a need for human interpretation — especially for journalistic content.
- A broadly distributed volunteer network could be given top stories from TMC members for translation, which would in turn, build our relationship as suppliers to publishers world wide. We could also deliberately design this site as an online community, that could have other benefits.
- Eventually, we may be able to pay for translations, especially if they are done locally with minimal cost.
- Simple off-the-shelf wiki software could post stories that need translating, and recognition/reputation and other social incentives could be built in to reward people for volume and quality.
- While there a lot we could do to reach global audiences, this tangible, simple translation service could be a useful step to get in the door, which would lead to other ideas.

Implications for MC

Small Group Report Outs

Full group discussion:

- Any major **“ah ha” moment** for you?
- How does this influence your thinking about **your organization?**
- What are **common connections** you see among what small groups presented?
- In light of this conversation, which **Action Ideas** would help MC members have the greatest impact in the future?
- What are **Action Ideas** are most suitable for the role of a consortium?
- What are our **next steps** for implementation?