

SERVICING ‘SELF-SCHEDULING CONSUMERS’:¹
PUBLIC BROADCASTERS AND AUDIO PODCASTING

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When veteran Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) Radio host Phillip Adams announced in May 2005 that his long-running Radio National program *Late Night Live (LNL)* was now available for download as a podcast, it was clear that a seismic shift had occurred in the Australian media landscape (‘Short Circuits’, 2005: 1; May, 2005; Kelly, 2005). Here was a self-confessed analogue media dinosaur spruiking a media technology previously confined to the murky domain of techno-obsessive underground radio. The awkward neologism ‘podcasting’ had clearly moved beyond its pirate radio and open source movement ghetto to register upon the consciousness of mainstream (or at least Radio National’s brand of mainstream) media audiences. Podcasting’s infiltration of Western culture seemed indisputable by the end of 2005 when the *New Oxford American Dictionary* anointed ‘podcasting’ its Word of the Year (‘Wordsmiths’, 2005).

For those less au fait with digital media developments than Phillip Adams, ‘podcasting’ (a telescoping of ‘iPod’ and ‘broadcasting’) is an innovative means of distributing digitised audio files to subscribing audiences. A broadcast program (such as *LNL*) is converted to mp3 format and is then uploaded to a media outlet’s website or one of the Internet’s many podcast directories. Interested consumers load ‘podcatcher’ RSS aggregator software (such as Apple’s iTunes) onto their computer, subscribe to podcasting feeds of interest, and their computer then automatically downloads each new podcast episode as it becomes available. These files can then be played on the user’s computer or – more attractively -- are transferable to any portable mp3-listening device such as Apple’s iPod range. Podcasting shares many characteristics of radio’s first major foray into

digital media – live Internet streaming – but is distinctive in its hybrid push/pull technology model, more modest bandwidth demands, and its capacity for mobile consumption. To date podcasting has been predominantly an audio phenomenon, but as next generation digital media players and faster broadband become more widespread, video-podcasting either on iPods or mobile telephones appears likely to overtake the audio variety (Ahonen, 2005; ‘Here’, 2006).

UPTAKE OF PODCASTING BY PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTERS

Perhaps weary of the charge that public service broadcasters’ (PSBers’) stricter budget constraints relegate them to playing catch-up in the realm of digital media, public broadcasters internationally have been notable early adopters of audio podcasting technology. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) launched its first podcasting trial in May 2005 (the same month as the ABC) with a number of its flagship Radio 4 programs offered for download. Having rapidly expanded its audio podcast offerings to 50 programs by February 2006, the BBC further announced in May this year the launch of a 12-month video-podcasting trial for news and current affairs programs, in addition to a ‘made-for-podcast’ weekly satirical news show, *STORYFix* (BBC, 2006). Similarly quick to respond to podcasting’s growth amidst US grassroots radio, National Public Radio (NPR) began podcasting in August 2005 (Glaser, 2005), rapidly achieving a permanent place on iTunes and Yahoo’s most-popular podcast rankings (‘NPR’, 2005), and by February 2006 offering approximately 200 programs for download (Potter, 2006: 64). NPR’s television affiliate, Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), in June 2006 created the position of Chief Content Officer, an executive specifically charged with multi-platforming PBS content, including for podcast (Jensen, 2006: E1). NPR has also begun to experiment with ‘original-to-podcasting’ content under the banner *alt.NPR*, dubbed ‘a separate brand for experimental content’ (‘NPR’, 2006). *Alt.NPR*’s blending of professional and amateur content heralds rich – albeit potentially problematic – possibilities for PSBers’ future relationships with audiences (‘NPR’, 2005; Glaser, 2005).²

The potential impact of podcasting upon industrial relations at PSBers was foregrounded by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's (CBC) August-September 2005 strike during which locked-out union staff began disseminating news and other programming via daily podcasts. In the phrasing of one of the CBC strike leaders, Mark O'Neill, 'this labor [sic] dispute could be the first example of broadcast journalists being able to produce their own content, thanks to the lowered cost of the gear needed to produce reports as well as the Internet as a distribution means' (Fried, 2005). Early adoption of podcasting at the CBC has been particularly influential for Australian PSBers. In mid-2005 ABC Radio invited CBC broadcaster and self-styled podcasting 'evangelist' Tod Maffin to be keynote speaker at its Digital Futures seminar as the ABC began to proselytise the possibilities of podcasting to the Australian public (Maffin, n.d.; May, 2005; Kelly, 2005; Javes, 2005; Brady, 2005; ABC, 2005: 64). The ABC's podcasting trials immediately bore fruit. Youth radio network Triple J had already prepared the market by podcasting its *Hack* current affairs program from December 2004 with 88,000 downloads registered by March 2006 (MacLean, 2006: 17). Even more encouraging for the ABC was Radio National's foray into podcasting with eight of its flagship talk programs available for download by May 2005. Phillip Adams aficionados, generally perceived as a static, aging demographic, positively fell upon podcasting with 75,000 program downloads per week by mid-June (Meade, 2005a: 22) with Radio National listeners, in a surprise result, responsible for half of all ABC podcast downloads by March 2006 (MacLean, 2006: 17). This exponential growth off a near non-existent base, and encouraging feedback to its podcasting survey, led Radio National to expand its offerings to 33 programs by March 2006 and to promote the service heavily across its radio programming.

For Australia's other national PSBer, the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS), early-adoption of podcasting has also had successes, although the multilingual nature of SBS radio creates challenges different from those confronting the ABC. During 2005, SBS Radio's *World View* and *Whatever Sessions* podcasting trials attracted 1,000 subscribers in only four weeks with minimal publicity (SBS, 2005: 41). The rapidity of this uptake prompted SBS to announce that all its 'language'

programs would be available by podcast by 2006 (2005: 41). However, the multilingual nature of SBS Radio programming already fractures its potential audience into very specific, non-transferable demographics. The broadcaster's podcasting foray has stirred debate as to whether a PSBer can afford to further fragment already niche audiences by discriminating on the basis of access to digital media technology. Despite podcasting's youth appeal, it is debatable whether this strategy represents a viable longer-term model for the broadcaster when most second-, third- and fourth-generation migrants speak only English (Meade, 2005b: 20). This debate occurred around the same period in which the boutique size of SBS-TV audiences was being foregrounded as the SBS Board considered allowing in-program advertising (Pearson, 2006: 30). This fact made a 'small-is-better' podcasting argument for SBS Radio all the more difficult to sustain.

THE PUBLIC BROADCASTER QUEST FOR PLATFORM-NEUTRAL CONTENT

Public-service broadcasters' warmly enthusiastic – almost messianic – embrace of audio podcasting since the phenomenon emerged in 2004 needs to be contextualised as merely the latest phase in a much longer trend of public media adopting digital technologies to fulfil their public-service remit in the second media age. In part, this trend is driven by PSBers' anxious quest for relevance in a climate of economic rationalism and user-pays orthodoxies, of commercial digital media abundance, of successive government funding cuts and – in Australia in recent years – of dogged complaints of entrenched and systemic bias pursued by federal Communications Ministers (Jacka, 2000; 2002; Dunn, 2005; Nolan, 2006). These daunting ideological, financial and technological challenges underpin Michael Tracey's grim verdict of PSBing as 'an institution born in one age, seeking to survive in one which is utterly different' (1998: 10).

However, since the publication of Tracey's pessimistically (if grandiloquently) titled *The Decline and Fall of Public Service Broadcasting* in 1998, academic discussion has focussed increasingly on PSBers' successes in re-branding themselves not as radio and TV broadcasters, but as multi-platform content portals (Martin, 1999; Murray, 2002). As former ABC Managing Director Brian

Johns envisaged in the early phase of ABC Online, the nation's premier PSBer should understand itself as an archive of Australian cultural creativity and be 'focussed on content, not just the delivery of programs' (1997: 10).³ The decoupling of PSBer content from any particular platform is now routinely and uncontroversially announced as a guiding organisational strategy in PSBer policy documents: the ABC's *Annual Report 2004-05* embeds as an organisational and operational norm 'cross-platform production' of content (6; cf. Dunn, 2006). This strategy of leveraging PSBer brand-integrity and audience loyalties across to emerging mediums has much to recommend it: being exempt from cross-media ownership laws, PSBers have long operated across multiple platforms; and, now that technological convergence has united all media upon a common digital platform, multipurposing content across radio, television and online is both inexpensive and relatively routine. Against this background of 1990s PSBer digital success stories – ABC Online in particular – the ABC has confidently embraced podcasting as merely another channel to deliver its high quality, long-shelf-life content to eager existing and new audiences (Dower, 2005: 84).

To date, commentary about PSBers and podcasting has almost invariably emerged from the corporate publications, media reports and press releases of PSBers themselves, coupled with the efforts of in-house podcasting evangelists such as Maffin. The tone of such work has generally been journalistic and frequently technophobic---understandable given the dearth of blue-sky stories in the PSBing sphere in recent years. Only in these last few months has a second wave of commentary about podcasting begun to appear in academic journals, such as Richard Berry's survey of podcasting's origins, its PSBer adoption, and the technology's significance for radio theory (2006). What the present paper aims to initiate is a third wave of reflection upon the rapid uptake of podcasting by PSBers which would be less given to techno-utopianism than to critical circumspection. Undoubtedly podcasting revivifies and strengthens PSBing's contemporary relevance by enabling audiences to free themselves from 'the tyranny of live', to sample PSBer content while mobile, and to revisit already-encountered PSBer content (Gillmor, 2005: xi). But the podcasting phenomenon also has the potential to undermine – as well as complement -- PSBers'

Charter principles. In its fracturing of PSBer listeners into ever more niche micro-audiences whose loyalty may lie more with the specific topic or presenter than the PSBer brand, are PSBers in fact weakening their market position? The unique technological profile of podcasting also means that Charter prohibitions on advertising do not apply to the new hybrid medium. Perhaps most troublingly, once audiences experience digital interactivity will they be content merely to subscribe to PSBers' repurposed podcasts, or will they demand an enhanced profile as content creators under the umbrella of the PSBer brand? Having promoted themselves as gatekeepers of quality content and journalistic integrity amongst the free-for-all babble of the Internet, will PSBers be forced by podcasting's interactive and low-barrier characteristics to allow audiences to become co-creators? At what point, in other words, does PSBers' enthused rhetoric of audience empowerment tip over into brand dilution?

COMPATIBILITY OF PODCASTING WITH THE PUBLIC BROADCASTING ETHOS

As so recently invented a technology, podcasting receives no mention in the Charter comprising section 6 of the *ABC Act 1983 (Cth)*. But its origins in the communitarian, anti-corporate open source movement and US underground radio predispose it to be highly compatible with the PSB ideals codified in the ABC's governing legislation.

*Inform, Entertain, Educate*⁴

Chief amongst podcasting's desirable characteristics for PSBers is the technology's potential to expand and enrich audiences' exposure to the vast array of content which PSBers produce. In this sense, as Maffin argues, podcasting is an ideal technology to 'extend the brand of the public broadcaster' (qtd in Berry, 2006: 151). This expanded demographic includes both existing audiences whose listening may be constrained by work commitments, as well as new, digitally habituated youth audiences---the demographic whose loyalty is imperative if PSBing is to have a viable political and financial future. Not only does podcasting expand the audience share of PSBers, it moreover offers a deeper, more sustained engagement with PSBer programming to audiences who

may previously have only listened to a program once in its broadcast form. Podcasting facilitates repeat listening far better than the domestic audio taping of the past, and complements the ABC's existing facilities for extending the shelf-life of its high quality content, such as online transcripts, tape sales and agreements with educational institutions.

*'Transmit to countries outside Australia broadcasting programs...'*⁵

Less predictably, the ABC's 2005 podcasting survey revealed a significant number of programs being downloaded by expatriate Australians and foreign nationals, or being emailed overseas by Australian-based podcasting subscribers. As Radio National Podcasting Manager Gordon Taylor states, 'it shows that someone making a podcast in Australia can actually achieve a very substantial international audience through this technology' (qtd in Dower, 2005: 84). Podcasting may thus prove a far more cost-effective, less politically sensitive and sponsorship-free way to transmit Australian programming to international audiences than the current Radio Australia or Australia Television, the ABC's troubled early-1990s foray into Asia-Pacific satellite broadcasting (Inglis, 2006: 288-89; 310-17).

Universality of availability

Podcasting serves as a textbook example of the fallacy of technological determinism, in that it is a medium invented by using existing media hardware (mp3 players and Internet connections) for a purpose not foreseen or planned for by their creators. For a PSBer charged with a universal service obligation, the already widespread infrastructure of computers, broadband connections and iPods amongst the Australian public is a boon in guaranteeing accessibility of programming. It is in fact more compelling, on accessibility grounds, to mount an argument for ABC podcasting than it is to advocate the ABC's foray into digital television -- ABC2 -- given that sales of digital television sets in Australia have markedly lagged behind other Western nations. Not only is podcasting's cost of adoption for consumers negligible, but the cost to PSBers of reformatting audio content from radio broadcast to downloadable mp3 file is minimal, and increasingly able to be automated for talk radio

programming where music copyright is not an issue. With the ABC's Internet portal ABC Online already amongst the most heavily trafficked Australian websites, publicising podcasts on the homepages of ABC Radio networks and during individual programs represents an inexpensive and highly targeted way to advise existing audiences of new listening options.

Universality of appeal

The foregoing arguments in favour of PSBer adoption of audio podcasting are predominantly benefits perceived from the point of view of the broadcaster; from the perspective of audiences, podcasting's overriding benefit is surely the ability to liberate listening from the schedule by time-shifting program consumption. Small wonder that these politically modish consumer empowerment arguments feature prominently in the ABC's public promotion of its podcasting service. The ABC's *Annual Report 2004-05* proclaims the organisation's responsiveness to 'growing demand for programming that is accessible and available at any time, in any place, and in any situation' (2005: 18). Maffin dubs this liberation of programming from the producer-determined linearity of the traditional radio schedule 'vertical listening': podcasting's indifference to traditional media program slots, and even to different networks within an overarching PSBing organisation, allows consumers to subscribe to audio-feeds on the basis of topic, rather than the logic of time of day, program or host. Audiences thus cut 'vertically' through broadcasters' traditionally horizontal conception of programming, and may sample programming in an order and combination unforeseen by network schedulers (n.d.). In addition, time-shifted portable consumption enables audiences to fracture PSBers' predominantly long-format, in-depth coverage into smaller segments, to be sampled at interval, and empowers a consumer of magazine-format programming to skip over segments of little appeal. The growth of such 'snack' media consumption habits may work positively to distinguish PSBer programming from the rash of 'mobisodes' and sports and reality TV highlights currently offered by commercial competitors. PSBer podcasts could, in *Variety's* analogy with the boom in high-nutrition snack foods, come to be regarded by consumers as 'a pellet of self-improvement on the go' (Zeitchik, 2006: 21).

In this respect, the advertising-free nature of ABC Radio markedly facilitates podcasting. Advertisers paying for commercial radio airtime may complain that podcasting erodes their mass audience, or that the asynchronicity between an advertisement's broadcast and its actual consumption renders it less commercially effective. None of these issues creates concerns, obviously, for a PSBer with an advertising prohibition. Conversely, however, the fact that podcasting is nowhere mentioned in the *ABC Act* means it cannot seek shelter under the Act's prohibition on broadcasting advertisements.⁶ Unfettered spaces for PSBer digital innovation all too easily translate into exposure to the chill winds of commercialism.

POTENTIAL CONFLICTS BETWEEN PODCASTING AND THE PUBLIC

BROADCASTING ETHOS

*'Broadcasting programs that contribute to a sense of national identity...'*⁷

PSBing's emergence in the early 20th century's golden age of the nation-state has meant that the concept of the PSBer as an instrument of nation-building has been prominent throughout the movement's history. Richard Hoggart's oft-quoted formulation of the PSBer allowing 'the nation to speak to itself' has found resonance amongst contemporary radio studies theorists. Scholars such as Susan Merrill Squier blend McLuhanite medium theory and Durkheimian ritual approaches in praising the integrative power of broadcast to unite geographically fragmented audiences into imagined 'communities of the air' (Squier, 2003: 1; Holmes, 2005: 144-49). Podcasting clearly challenges the nation-building underpinnings of the PSBer ethos in two fundamental ways. In a digital media environment of programming abundance, aggregating a 'national' community is invariably difficult. But this is doubly so where audiences self-select into micro communities based upon topics of interest, and subscribe to podcasts accordingly. Whether the ABC can successfully have it both ways – serving 'both a mass audience and masses of audiences' – remains to be seen (ABC, 2005: 26). Secondly, theorists of broadcasting have praised radio's capacity for liveness or simultaneity, a suturing of chronologies of production and consumption which is ruptured by the

time-shifted nature of podcast consumption. This may be why radio's most simultaneity-dependent program formats, such as talkback and live news crosses, are least successfully transferred to podcast---ABC Radio National's *Australia Talks Back*, for example, was not amongst the first raft of programs chosen for the podcasting trial. The audience fragmentation which is the inevitable corollary of podcasting's emphasis on consumer choice thus significantly challenges PSBers' nationalising self-conception. Broadcasting's foundational ideal of an integrative community all clustered around their radios at a specific time and place is radically undermined by podcasting; as radio practitioner and theorist Norie Neumark states, with podcasting we 'bypass the pleasures as well as the exigencies of timeslot' (2006: 214).

One ABC?

Related to the foregoing challenge of audience fragmentation is the risk of PSBer brand fragmentation in the podcasting era. One of the underrated pleasures of traditional broadcasting's push technology has been audiences' passive experience of programming 'flow' (Williams, 1975: 86). From a radio broadcaster's perspective, audiences' tendency to keep the radio on in the background as aural wallpaper greatly increases the likelihood of serendipitous program discovery through tuning in early, hearing promotions for forthcoming programs, or merely by staying tuned after the end of a selected program. With podcasting's pull-based subscriber technology, audiences download only the selected program, and are thus less easily convertible into audiences for other programming by the PSBer, or even other programming on the same network. The risk is clearly of the PSBer fracturing in the audience's mind into a cluster of unrelated brands, much in the way that many undergraduate-aged audiences already do not associate Triple J with the allegedly 'fusty' and Anglophilic ABC-TV. In terms of growing this vital Generation-Y demographic through ABC brands, and winning their political loyalty for sustaining PSBing, brand fragmentation represents a major challenge for PSBers. A restive BBC Chairman Michael Grade earlier this year observed of the on-demand media environment: 'Channels become much less important. Search engines guide viewers to the content they want' (2006). Perhaps the ABC might counter the potential for

consumer dissociation of its various networks by organising their podcasting subscriptions not only around specific programs (*LNL, The Science Show, All in the Mind* etc.) but around particular topics (eg jazz, creative writing, stem cell research, law). The multiplatforming approach to maximising audience engagement with PSBer content will only be effective in growing market-share if audiences have as many pathways as possible into the ABC's content hub.

*'The Corporation shall not broadcast advertisements...'*⁸

From its coining in 2004, the term 'podcasting' has bourn the impress of commercialism in its explicit reference to Apple's iPod music player. Belatedly recognising the exponential growth of underground podcasting, in June 2005 a formerly ambivalent Apple decided to embrace the phenomenon by incorporating podcasting applications into the release of its iTunes 4.9 software, leading a rival Microsoft blogger to suggest, somewhat chagrined, that the 'pod' in 'podcasting' should instead be understood as an acronym for '*personal on demand*' (Descy, 2005: 4). Regardless of the outcome of these jousts for semantic control of the 'podcasting' neologism, it is apparent that podcasting has never enjoyed the distance from vested interests enshrined in the public-service broadcasting ethos (O'Sullivan, 2000: 194).

The fact that podcasting is too recent to have been included in the wording of the 1983 ABC Charter, and does not constitute 'broadcasting' in the term's traditional sense, also means it cannot shelter under the Charter's prohibition on advertising. ABC Radio host Michael Duffy – whose own Radio National program *Counterpoint* is available for podcast -- was thus able to call publicly for the commercialisation of podcasting in early 2006. Duffy argued along the same lines as former ABC Board member Michael Kroger had in 1999 in lobbying for the commercialisation of the ABC's other major, non-broadcasting digital innovation, ABC Online (Duffy, 2006: 39; Inglis, 2006: 443-44). PSBer podcasting enthusiasts should not dismiss these moves as mere shadowboxing by the Right: ABC Radio podcasting manager Gordon Taylor has gone on record saying, 'I think the ABC would be able to do it [charge listeners for podcasts] but it's a fairly high-

level policy decision and certainly there's been some work done on it. As of now, we've decided to keep going the way we are' (MacLean, 2006: 17).

This represents a more fundamental challenge for the ABC than for any of its national or international PSBer equivalents. SBS already takes TV advertising and has recently increased its in-program advertising airtime; NPR and PBS are already primarily funded through corporate sponsorship and public 'pledges' or donations; CBC has long carried paid advertising on its networks;⁹ and in the UK, television households already fund the BBC directly through the annual licence fee. Hence, each of these PSBers has already had experience in erecting Chinese walls to quarantine editorial content from sponsor interests, or has a decades-long history of public preparedness to support the PSBer on an individual-giving basis. By contrast, the ABC's funding by triennial direct Commonwealth appropriation means Australian citizens broadly perceive of the ABC as a public good and have little political expectation or demonstrated appetite for paying individually for PSBer content. If commercially-supported or fee-based ABC podcasts become the norm, it could prove a Trojan Horse for the introduction of advertising into the ABC. This has the potential to compromise seriously the editorial independence of the ABC more generally, and could irreparably alienate its key constituencies.

It's Your ABC...

Podcasting's origins in community radio framed the emergent medium as highly accessible to amateurs, open to experimentation, and characterised by a fast-and-loose attitude to the niceties of copyright (Herrington, 2005). Podcasting's early incubation in the open source movement similarly encouraged amongst practitioners a conception of the medium closer to that of a wiki: highly interactive, hostile to individual alienation and property rights, and impatient to push the technology in new directions. Quality – both of content and production – is at best erratic. Trawling the 'podosphere' in researching this paper leads me to endorse the view of one commentator that too many podcasts resemble 'two stoners yakking at each other in a basement' (qtd in Potter, 2006: 64).

It is not without irony, therefore, that podcasting has been so enthusiastically embraced by PSBers, whose discourse is pervaded by the mantras of program quality, broadcaster authority and scrupulous professionalism. In rising to the now decade-old challenge of adapting Reithian *noblesse oblige* models to the interactive possibilities of the second media age, ABC Online has had some success with message-boards facilitating feedback for program-makers, guestbooks for programs such as *Enough Rope*, and live online forums, such as those which follow broadcasts of *Four Corners*. Yet these are heavily moderated and, because they run live in late-evening timeslots, are draining on staff resources and budgets (Dunn, 2006). In fact, until the ABC reformatted its live forums recently, it was possible to determine from the gaps in the ‘post id’ numbers just how many public comments were considered too inflammatory, defamatory or corrosive of the PSBer’s authority to be posted online. The problem for PSBers in promoting audience interactivity is that audiences are inclined to take them at their word.

PSBers internationally currently evince mixed responses to this dilemma of how brand integrity might be sustained in a medium which is premised upon dissolving the boundaries between professional and amateur media production. A currently cautious ABC is careful to corral its podcast audiences into purely consumptive practices, its ‘Terms of Use’ insisting that users:

may not use these audio or audio-visual files for any other purpose (including but without limitation downloading, editing, or using these files for the purpose of (a) distribution to a third party; or (b) promoting, advertising, endorsing or implying a connection with you (or a third party) and the ABC, its agents or employees).¹⁰

NPR, by contrast, appears to conceive of podcasting more as an extension of PSBers’ traditional role of training industry entrants. Its *alt.NPR* initiative promotes a mixture of professional and amateur/experimental content, with its *Youthcast* program by up-and-coming audio producers specifically designed as a conduit for new broadcasting talent to gain production credentials and audience exposure. The BBC, for its part, is experimenting with amateur co-productions in its

BackStage online initiative, which ‘aims to foster a newly constructive and open dialogue with the wider development community using BBC content and tools to deliver public value’.¹¹

Nevertheless, the rhetoric of community-mindedness is undercut by very specific policies to keep the esteemed BBC brand at arm’s length from less savoury aspects of Internet ‘community’;

BackStage’s ‘Terms of Use’ echo those of the ABC in expressly prohibiting ‘re-edit[ing] or re-contextualis[ing] of BBC Content in any way that is illegal, is or is likely to bring the BBC into disrepute or is otherwise inappropriate’.¹²

PSBing has much ideological common ground with community media, but has always worked strenuously to distinguish itself on the grounds of superior professionalism, nationally-based appeal and technological sophistication. With similar ambivalence, the formerly push-technology-minded PBSer is both attracted by the potential for audience engagement offered by interactive network technologies, but fearful that opening the door too wide to amateurs could compromise its self-presentation as a hub of quality content. As consumers adjust to the digital world of media plenty, gatekeeper discrimination has been rescued from the demonising of early second media age critics (Gilder, 1992; Negroponte, 1995; Poster, 1995). It has now been resurrected as a positive selling point. The future of PSBers’ exciting initial forays into podcasting will thus depend upon how well these divergent professional and community media traditions can be harnessed. More pressingly, in light of the Media Reform Bill’s pending introduction, it will also depend upon whether PSBers can successfully broker a functional podcasting hybrid in a politically hostile, rapidly deregulating, and commercially voracious media marketplace.

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NOTES

¹ *ABC Corporate Plan 2004-07*: 3.

² <http://www.npr.org/rss/pod/alt-npr.html>.

³ <http://www.abc.net.au/>.

⁴ *ABC Act 1983 (Cth)* s.6(1)(a).

⁵ s.6(1)(b).

⁶ s.31(1).

⁷ s.6(1)(a)(i).

⁸ s.31(1).

⁹ Interestingly, CBC broadcaster and ABC consultant Tod Maffin argues ‘there is no reason why public radio can’t charge for this kind of service’ ---not a view that was widely publicised during his stint with the ABC in May 2005 (n.d.).

¹⁰ <http://www.abc.net.au/services/podcasting/help.htm>. This prohibition on third-party distribution throws an interesting light on the Radio National podcasting trial’s findings of Australian residents eagerly emailing podcast files to overseas acquaintances.

¹¹ <http://backstage.bbc.co.uk/archives/2005/01/about.html>.

¹² http://backstage.bbc.co.uk/archives/2005/01/terms_of_use.html.