

DePauw researcher's book uses four cases studies to distill the essence of successful, new community media

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[\(view Media Giraffe profile of Kevin Howley\)](#)

Cambridge University Press published in May, 2005 a book by researcher Kevin Howley at DePauw University in Indiana which includes cases studies of four community-media projects -- radio, TV, print and computer network . Howley says these projects are meeting the "felt need" of local populations "to create media systems that are relevant of their everyday lives."

The projects are:

- [WFHB, community radio](#) in Bloomington, Ind.
- [Downtown Community Television](#) in New York City
- [Street Feat, a newspaper](#) for the homeless in Halifax, Nova Scotia
- [VICNET, a community computer network](#) sponsored by the state library of Victoria, Australia.

An excerpt ([PDF DOWNLOAD](#)) of the book's introduction is available. In it, Howley writes:

"Taken in turn, each of these four cases highlight the complex, contested and contradictory process of building and sustaining a community-media organization in an increasingly privatized global media environment. Together, they suggest an implicit, cross-cultural and timeless understanding of the profound linkages between community cohesion, social integration and communicative forms and practices. "

BOOK: "[Community Media: People, Places and Communication Technologies](#)," by Kevin Howley. Copyright, 2006, Cambridge University Press. ISBN 0-5217-96687.

On Jan. 23, 2006, Prof. Howley provided by email to the Media Giraffe Project answers to the following questions:

Q: What is the significance of your research from the point of view of identifying sustainable models for local journalism?

HOWLEY: Each of the case studies highlights the desire for substantive local journalism. What's distinctive about each of the cases, then, is the unique ways in which the communities leveraged available resources to make a viable organization-- one that responded not to the logic of the marketplace, but to the felt need of local populations. The crux here, then, is for communities to evaluate not only their needs, but their strengths -- the human, technical and social capital, if you will, of each locality in order to create a viable organization.

Q: If you could think of three things which would accelerate the development of local community news services (in any medium), what would they be?

HOWLEY: The first would be national media reform. I'm not talking about the de-regulation mess that passes for 'reform.' Instead, I firmly believe that we must have communication policy that recognizes the value and importance of local media. In other words, we need to codify a 'mixed media system' one which encourages commercial, public service, non-commercial and independent media. For non-commercial and independents, this means legal protections as well as economic investment.

The second would be business models. There are a number of outstanding models out there, doing precisely the sort of journalism that matters to local communities. Here I'm thinking of The Nation, AlterNet, and Democracy Now! to name a few. Foreign news services likewise provide some excellent models. But these organizations don't get the sort of publicity they deserve. They tend to serve 'niche' audiences--we need to get the word out about independent journalism of this sort. Journalism and media studies educators likewise should routinely present and discuss indy journalism in their courses. The effects are palpable. Whenever I show students the Big Noise film 911, for example, they recognize right off the quality of the information presented and can't help but notice how this work is hard to find -- even in multi-channel universe.

The third would be education. Media literacy is vital. but I don't mean literacy of the sort that promotes technical know-how. that's relatively easy if schools have the financial resources to do so. Rather, I firmly believe that media literacy of the sort that highlights the vital role media plays in democratic societies is crucial. Media literacy of the sort that challenges the conventional wisdom that suggests that private (monopoly) control of public communication systems is a good thing. In other words, private interests (profit accumulation) is neither consistent nor necessarily compatible with the public interest.

Q: What motivates the people who work at the four organizations you profiled?

HOWLEY: Lots of motivations. A profound dissatisfaction with the media they read, see and hear. There's also the fight for social justice that motivates a great many people. They recognize the relationship between symbolic and material relations of power and the implications this has for a just and equitable society. Then there are the creative types who seek a venue to express themselves. Local media encourage expression that other outlets (commercial and public service) find too controversial, too unpopular, too risky, etc.

Q: Why did you pick these four examples?

Each helped to illustrate certain conditions that I wanted to explore in detail. WFHB, for instance, speaks volumes to the political economy of U.S. broadcasting. DCTV demonstrates how new technologies can be used for community building. Street Feat is one of several street news papers that have emerged in Canada in recent years. VicNet demonstrates how communication and information technologies (CIT) challenge conventional notions of place-based communities and the tensions between 'the local and the global.'

Q: If you could update your book today, would you have any fresh examples?

Plenty, if I could spend enough time with certain organizations. My book doesn't deal much with LPFM stations--a very dynamic development. I'd like to study a Independent Media Center (IMC) some time soon. Then there are any number of so-called 'ethnic broadcasters' that deserve attention. In short, there are all sorts of initiatives out there that really should be part of any work on community media.

Q: What are your researching now?

HOWLEY: I'm working on an edited volume on community media. This will allow me to capture some of the exciting developments taking place around the world and tap in to 'local experts'.

Q: How did you get interested in this subject?

HOWLEY: I've been involved in community media for well over 20 years. I've learned a lot about production, political economy, the cultural politics of media representation, community organizing and social movements over that time. CM is a rich site of inquiry, one that is all too often overlooked by academics. This, thankfully, is changing.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

[Kevin Howley](#) Ph. D., Associate Professor
Department of Communication & Theater
Pulliam Center for Contemporary Media
DePauw University
709 S. Locust Street
Greencastle, IN 46135
Tel. (765) 658-4491
Fax. (765) 658-4499