

**Bell-Atlantic Temple University Conference on Digital
Communication
Strategic Planning Session
November 20, 1998**

**REPORT
by Jean Pierre Beugoms**

**"The Challenge of the Digital Age:
A Forum of Diverse Perspectives"**

On November 20, 1998, Bell Atlantic-Pennsylvania and Temple University sponsored a strategic planning session for an international conference on digital communications to be held in May 7-9, 1999, at Temple University's Sugarloaf Conference Center in Philadelphia. The purpose of the conference was to provide a forum in which leading media and other industry executives, members of the creative community ("content providers"), community leaders, and scholars address a variety of issues concerning the digital age and formulate an agenda for the May conference. The proceedings were moderated by Irene Berkowitz, Coordinator, Office of the Vice Provost, Temple University.

George Gerbner, Bell Atlantic Professor of Telecommunications at Temple University, and organizer of the conference, introduced the session. He posed the challenge of exploring how the explosion in communications that digital represents can provide greater equality of access instead of further concentration of power. Patricia Beadling, Vice President, External and Public Relations at Bell Atlantic-Pennsylvania, commented on how the telecommunications industry is changing and on the difficulties in keeping up with these changes. Peter Goodwin, Acting Dean, Graduate School of Temple University, commented on Temple's growing emphasis on technology and its partnership with Bell Atlantic since 1987.

Presentations by Participants

The Conference began with five-minute presentations by each of the participants:

Law professor and a member of the Board of Directors of the Screen Actors Guild, Roy Eugene Boggs, Jr. emphasized that the digital age is a momentous change for performing artists, and that this change in technology will significantly influence the kind, quality, and amount of work they get.

John H. Downing of the University of Texas at Austin's talked about how public spheres like the Internet have emerged in which members of otherwise disadvantaged groups

can communicate amongst themselves. and others. He brought up the examples of the Sindhi minority in India, and of the Uighur minority in China, and asked what a digital future will mean to groups of this kind.

Consultant in Media Education and Chair of Canadians Concerned about Violence in Entertainment, Rose A. Dyson, talked about emergent Canadian trends from the community activism point of view. She outlined her organization's position toward the CRTC's (Canadian Radio and Telecommunications Commission) hearings on the convergence and interaction between television, radio, telephone, and computers. She warned that if the CRTC ignores the net, it will end up abandoning its duties in setting the ground rules for broadcasting and telecommunications.

Linda K. Fuller, communications professor of Worcester State College discussed the censorship of various forms of expression on the Internet like the V-Chip and cyberspace indecency laws.

Paul Klite, executive director of Rocky Mountain Media Watch, presented the case for FCC scrutiny of media content. With the introduction of digital TV spectrum in the US, he said, the FCC has another opportunity to reconsider the rules considering broadcasters' obligation to the public interest.

Jerry Landay, journalism and communications professor of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, presented his "digital crystal ball" and posed several key questions: "Is mass communications to, by and of the people solely the business of business or is it the coequal sphere of public business? Can open space for public discussion be preserved side-by-side with corporate speech? If not, what are the logical political and cultural consequences?"

Hye-Jung Park, director of programs for New York's Downtown Community Television Center, talked about multicultural images in the digital age and especially in the global commercial market. She pointed out that media images of the working class are seldom, if ever, seen. Park asserted that ethnic communities have the right to produce their own images and messages.

Connie Schuster, founder and director of Artists for Recovery, talked about how information on mental health issues has been ignored and distorted by the mainstream media. She expressed the hope that in the digital age alternative information may at last get out to the people.

Renee Cherow O'Leary, president of *Education for the 21st Century*, talked about the "challenges for education in the digital age." She recounted a discussion she had with her students at Rutgers University about their concerns with

and hopes for the digital age. In general, O'Leary said, few of her students were technological optimists.

Clay Steinman, communications and theater professor of Macalester College, discussed the continuing social need for noncommercial media space. We need spaces, he said, where diverse communities could have the ability to use information to talk about their own histories and to tell their own stories.

Continuing on this idea, Elaine Wynne, Co-Founder and Director of the International Family Storytelling Center, told her own personal story about the frustrating experience of getting on-line for the first time.

Binod C. Agrawal, Director of the Taleem Research Foundation in India, talked about what the digital age and unlimited connectivity means to the Indian sub-continent. He outlined several areas of concern: How can this technology be used to effectively respond to sustainable development and to inculcate democratic values? Will these changes improve the quality of life in India? Will they result in the cultural homogenization of a multicultural society? And to what extent will these technologies adapt to the national communications needs in India and South Asia?

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Cynthia Golden, Executive Director of Computing and Technology Services at Duquesne University, talked about the challenges colleges and universities face in providing the foundation (facilities, services, support) for faculty and students, and how the rapid advances in technology are affecting higher education in general. She also brought up several areas of concern, including the maintenance and security of equipment in classrooms and computer labs, and the industry-wide problem in recruiting enough support staff.

Nancy Snow, professor of political science at New England College and executive director of Common Cause of New Hampshire, talked about campaign finance reform in the digital age. The Federal Election Commission, for example, has made information on federal campaign donations, especially soft-money contributions, available on the web. Snow also proposed a tax on the use of the public domain to fund the discussion of public issues.

Norman Felsenthal, professor of communications at Temple University, talked about the delivery system, high-definition television: Felsenthal believes that once the public sees it, they'll want it. He argues that the progress of HDTV in society will be similar to that of the early days of color television. Rapidly declining costs, analogous to that of PCs, will result in the majority of the United States population watching HDTV, but it will be a long time before broadcasters will abandon analog signals. HD will become an opportunity for broadcasters to regain the audience share lost to cable.

Yahya R. Kamalipour, professor of communication and creative arts at Purdue University Calumet, expressed concerns about ethnicity and the media. The barrage of negative media images towards ethnic groups, particularly those from the Middle East region, continue to promote fear, resentment, and irrational behavior toward those groups. Kamalipour then asked several questions: Would the emerging digital age change the old media habits? Would content producers reexamine the consequences of negative portrayals of ethnic groups in the media? And would more choices in information channels and products necessarily result in mutual respect and better understanding? Or will images be manipulated more than ever before?

Herbert W. Simons, professor of speech communication at Temple University, posed three questions: First, can there be some sort of marriage between what a campus can do best, live discussion and debate, and the possibilities of the new technologies, particularly distance learning? Second, how can we humanize distance learning? And third, how can we teach on-line public speaking?

Howard A. Myrick, professor of communications and theater at Temple University, asked if the participants could frame their conversations in a language for multiple audiences in order to make a production out of the videotapes. He also made the observation that digital literacy will become as important as basic literacy.

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Sherri Hope Culver, General Manager of WYBE Public Television, dissented from Nancy Snow's suggestion that commercial broadcasters be taxed to fund public broadcasting. What can happen in that situation, she said, is that the money would go to one public broadcaster per market and thus reduce rather than increase diversity of sources.

Recommendations

After a lunch break, the participants split into groups to consider four issues for the Spring Conference: 1. Public access and public space. 2. Regulation and censorship. 3. Globalization 4. Effects of technology on work and social life.

During the subsequent plenary session, the groups gave their reports and recommendations for the May conference. The following is a summary of these reports.

On the subject of public access and public space, the suggestion was made that focus groups representative of different elements of society talk amongst themselves about what they want from the digital media.

Concerning regulation and censorship, there was significant disagreement on whether regulation would be appropriate or even possible. The group explored the issue of globalization, focusing on how local cultures can act as filters for content. The group talked about the effects of the free market and technology on the production of media. They also talked about how telecommunications competition can be used to draw service to the former Eastern Bloc countries where there has previously been only one provider, and to Third World countries, and how competition in those areas can expand the telecommunication options for those people.

Other recommendations included greater involvement of corporate people, high-profile "drawing card" personalities, and the creation of a panel that would include the consumers of the new technology, corporate, government, labor, non-profit organizations, and the academy.

**Bell-Atlantic Temple University Conference on Digital Communication
"The Challenge of the Digital Age: A Forum of Diverse Perspectives"**

A report of the Strategic Planning Session held November 20, 1998 at the Sugarloaf Conference Center of Temple University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

On November 20, 1998, Bell Atlantic-Pennsylvania and Temple University sponsored a strategic planning session for an international conference on digital communications to be held in June 3-5, 1999, at Temple University's Sugarloaf Conference Center in Philadelphia. The purpose of the conference was to provide a forum in which leading media and other industry executives, members of the creative community ("content providers"), community leaders, and scholars address a variety of issues concerning the digital age and formulate an agenda for the May conference. The proceedings were moderated by Irene Berkowitz, Coordinator, Office of the Vice Provost, Temple University.

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**Report of the Digital Conference Planning Committee
held May 1, 1998**

In attendance:

Irene Berkowitz (Temple University)
Norm Felsenthal (Temple University)
Mike Geiger (Bell Atlantic)
George Gerbner (Temple University)
Susan Kahlenberg (Temple University)
Brian Linson (Cultural Indicators Research Project)
Concetta Stewart (Temple University)
Victoria Tredinnick (Cultural Environment Movement)

Note: There is also a Board of Advisors associated with the Bell Chair and this conference whose precise role in this plan is yet to be determined.

The group began by asking, "What is the message of the conference? What is the question to be addressed?" We ended with a 3-part plan for putting the agenda into the hands of those who will be at the table. The plan is described first, along with some residual questions, followed by the list of tasks assigned to everyone present, and ending with a summary of the discussion which took place around the development of the plan.

TIME LINE

Summer 1998 (SURVEY)

Open-ended survey submitted to 20 to 30 stakeholders. Expect 15 to 20 survey respondents. Responses synthesized (not interpreted) and circulated among the respondents for further refinement. Outcome determines agenda and questions to be addressed on November 20, 1998.

Friday, November 20, 1998 (DIGCON1)

Survey respondents gather in Philadelphia for a 1-day round table to interpret survey results and further explore common interests and conflicting goals. Results presented in format of Court Opinion: majority, minority and dissenting positions represented. Report publicized; build May 1999 conference around outcomes. For example, invite position papers around issues defined at this meeting.

early May 1999 (DIGCON2)

High-profile weekend conference (Thu pm, Fri, Sat) in NY or DC; pre- and post-conference publicity. (How many participants expected?) Issues and questions are opened up to a broader audience; attention to including aspects which are of general appeal and relevant to members of the general public. Next steps are discussed; agenda(s) for action developed. Keynoter, moderator, presentations. Proceedings are filmed. Manifesto for publication in high-profile locations.

[Alternate format along the lines of the Aspen model: Prepared position papers are solicited and circulated among round table participants in Summer 1998, followed by day-long gathering to discuss and react to these position papers in November 1998. Results are synthesized after conference, publicized and used to prepare the May 1999 conference. This approach generally gave way to the survey/interview method and more pre-gathering synthesis to develop a meaningful agenda.]

Although the November 1998 date for DIGCON1 may be short notice to successfully gather so many busy people in one place, there was a general feeling that the survey and first meeting would be handled equally well by representatives and spokespersons of our targeted invitees, as is anyway standard practice in many instances. Having once lent

their voices to the first discussion, the various parties in either case will no doubt feel compelled to participate directly in DIGCON2, the high-profile, public conference of Spring 1999, in which their prior input will be playing a major role.

Question: Is response to the survey necessarily a commitment to (indirect) attendance at DIGCON1? Perhaps it should be made clear that it is -- each response represents a certain amount of work in preparation for the round table discussion and may contribute significantly to the framing of that discussion.

UNDERLYING PHILOSOPHY

We agreed that the goal of bringing people together around this issue is to create a dialogue among various constituencies, facilitate mutual understandings of the motivations and points of view of all concerned parties, and draw out a clearer picture of the (common) interests and particular conflicting goals of those at the table. Representation of the range of ideological positions is key.

Context of invitation to the table is neutral, welcoming and receptive of all points of view and perspectives. Every effort will be made to reduce perceptions of bias (warranted and unwarranted) that might be associated with the gathering. [Footnote: For this reason, the public role of CEM/CI should be restricted to that of a stakeholder among stakeholders, rather than a primary sponsor. Nonetheless, the bulk of the organizational and staffing work will be done by CEM using CEM resources, at least until funds to supplement the Temple/Bell Atlantic seed money are found.] We seek to create an atmosphere where the various stakeholders will feel able to speak openly and honestly about their positions, the better to facilitate mutual understanding and open, lively discussion of the various positions and assumptions of others at the initial round table.

The agenda is driven by the participants and revealed in the surveys. Issues for exploration and points of discussion arise from their own self-interest. The aim is to ensure a meaningful discussion that engages the participants and ensures each of them a stake in the conversation.

The November gathering will not be high-profile; we do not want parties to platform in lieu of serious and considered discussion.

Revised Prospectus for wide distribution [title?]

Unbeknownst to most Americans, the "digital age" begins on December 31, 2006. On that day, or soon thereafter if extended (which is now likely), television and other systems of communication, ranging from computers to satellites, will change. The change to digital technology holds out the promise of greater diversity of communication than has ever before been possible. Moreover, the Telecommunications Act of 1996 has recently opened the way for the recent convergence of various media industries, including network television and telephone providers buying cable stations, computer companies going into WebTV, and software companies becoming Internet providers.

Problems are being encountered by all vested parties for which solutions are not known. To tap into these problems and issues as they impact the various interested publics would create a rich dialogue and open new avenues of thought. The purpose of this 3-part event is to provide a forum for constructive dialogue among leading telecommunication industry executives, members of the creative community, community leaders, consumer advocates and media scholars, leading to an international conference in which media and public attention is focused on this critical juncture in communication.

MODEL

The model for the 3-part event is the excellent PBS program on human consciousness, in which leading experts from a variety of disciplines were first interviewed individually on camera, each participant was able to see the others' interviews before convening, and the subsequent 12-hour discussion was filmed and then broadcast on PBS.

While taped spontaneous interviews are perhaps ideal, we do not have the staff, money or time to make that happen and will instead substitute a survey, possibly supplemented with phone interviews. We are adding a third step, in which the discussion is opened up to broader public involvement. In our case, have C-SPAN tape and broadcast the May 1999 proceedings; C-SPAN tape then edited down by a Temple film student for distribution and/or PBS airing.

SPONSORS

Temple University, Bell Atlantic, and others to be sought out.

PARTICIPANTS

Target 20-30 individuals; expect 15-20 to participate. Invite key players from industry (including content providers, producers and distributors, receiver and set manufacturers), government, private sector law, academics, artists, journalists, public advocacy groups. Attention to media of the future: invite Microsoft and multimedia producers as well as the television and film industries. Broad representation is key.

- In considering the list of names below, recall there are really 3 lists we need to create:
1. SURVEY/DIGCON1 Initial survey of experts. All survey respondents are invited to the November 20 Round Table.
 2. DIGCON2 Keynoter (to attract media attention).
 3. DIGCON2 Moderator (perceived as neutral).

Name	Claim to fame	Event	DIGPLAN contact
Alan Alda	entertainer	Moderator	GG
Harry Belafonte	entertainer	Moderator	GG
Bill Bradley	lawmaker		
Julie Brown Campbell	Nat'l Council of Churches		GG
Mario Cuomo	former governor of NY	Moderator	
Kenny Gamble	record co. owner, MTV		
Bill Gates	Microsoft		
George Gerbner	Convener/TUBellChair,CEM,CI	Survey	
Al Gore	Public Int. Advisory Cmte		
Terry Gross	Phila. radio	Moderator	
Geraldine Laborn	Nickelodeon/Disney		NF/CC
Bill Mawr	talk show host	Moderator	
McCain	lawmaker		
Bill Moyers	journalist	Moderator	
Susan Ness	FCC Commissioner	Survey	
Eli Noam			
Rob Reiner	producer/director		
Charlie Rose	talk show host	Moderator	
Kathleen Sendoval	FCC Div. of Business Opportunities		
Ray Smith		Survey	
Karen Turner			
Ted Turner	owner		
Oprah Winfrey	talk show host	Keynoter,Moderator	
Mohammed Yunis	successful microlender	Survey	
Wade	Phila-area Wade Cablevision	Survey	

Appendix -- Names considered by the group but determined to have too much baggage or be otherwise unsuitable:

Ed Asner	entertainer		
Bill Cosby	entertainer		
Michael Kinglsey	Firing Line	Moderator	
Patti LaBelle	entertainer		
Lani Guinier	Penn law school	Keynoter	GG

SURVEY QUESTIONS

Potential issues to be addressed in the survey, ultimately to be stated as broad and unbiased questions that, to the extent possible, do not carry the particular assumptions of one stakeholder or another:

What changes might we expect to see in the status of competition and deregulation in the near future?

What is programming in the public interest?

What is public access? public participation?

What imperatives for public access/public participation/public interest obligations (actual or implied) exist?

What is the global impact of these changes in technology and/or regulation?

Access (costs, funding)

Globalization (int'l law, cultures, technological imperialism, business concerns)

Establishment of primary objectives (information, entertainment, commerce, cultural transfer), and policy issues surrounding them

Issues of intellectual property

Privacy v. free speech

Increasing v. decreasing democracy (cost and accessibility v. driving imperatives and establishment of regulation, ownership, etc.)

New paradigms (what issues are changing? remaining constant?)

SOME REMAINING CONSIDERATIONS

Grant applications: To be made in GG's name as Bell Atlantic Chair? funds ultimately administered by Temple? CEM? Conference correspondence uses GG's Temple University/Bell Chair letterhead; mailing address is GG's faculty office. Victoria should get a Temple email account to use for DIGCON correspondence. Potential grantors: the usual suspects, Arthur Anderson, law firms.

Conference theme: Our working title, "Public space in the digital age" may be read to beg the question whether there is such a thing as public airways, a potential point of dissent among our conferees and a fundamental question in itself. A new title will undoubtedly emerge as the survey is developed.

Publicity: Still to be fleshed out and worked into 3-part plan. Ideas: Full-page ad in major publications (NYTimes, etc.). Avenue for interested individuals to submit name and contact information, request information, make contributions, voice agreement/dissent. Town meeting. Press conference. Web page (attached to GG's faculty account).

Program content: Find ways to introduce light touches and changes of pace into the programs. Make available CI research data and analysis? Presentation of CI results to come through stakeholder perspective.

Impact and longevity: Our focus is (indirectly) on the projected date for the introduction of the new technology, 2006, but by then will the conference proceedings be relevant? What can we put into a video or conference proceedings that will be interesting and useful in 2006?

TASKS ASSIGNED

Survey: Irene Berkowitz, Mike Geiger, Concetta Stewart, Tom Gordon

Submit grant applications: VT, Brian Linson

Staffing: VT, Susan Kahlenberg. VT to work with BTMM & GG to find a Temple intern.

DIGPLAN DISCUSSION OUTTAKES

Content is not a focus of the industry right now.

Perhaps HDTV should be the focus of the conference, viewed as the integration of digital w/broadcast technology, rather than the digital spectrum itself.

Why do we need HDTV? No compelling argument has been heard, even from the industry.

While Telecommunications Act of 1996 held out the promise of progress such as that represented by the Internet, there is perhaps an undercurrent in Congress of having been conned by the industry in this case. There is a sense that Congress (e.g., McCain) feels double-crossed by the industry and may now be more open to a closer examination and regulation of broadcasters' obligations. Possible change in the deregulatory climate within the next 5 years requiring more responsibility/accountability on the part of broadcasters.

Are more or fewer channels desirable? The former opens up potential diversity of content (albeit offset by the possibility of social Balkanization); the latter contributes to the development of common experiences through shared viewing. Diversity of content not necessarily coincidental with diversity of channels.

On public involvement in television content: Diversity of voices not necessarily determined by the diversity of avenues of production. It may well be that viewer demand for diversity of content will outweigh producers' values. But on the whole there is little room for public participation or voice given the current close ties between production and distribution channels. Removing these ties would be a first step toward opening up avenues for public participation. As it is, we can predict with some certainty that public involvement will come spontaneously through the requirement that we obtain newer, more expensive hardware.

On the introduction of costly replacement hardware: This new technology brings with it a potential for economic partition. It was pointed out, however, that state-of-the-art television sets and cable viewing are high on the priority list even for the lowest-income households and it is not likely that a large portion of the population will actually be cut off from the new world of digital television.