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Public Broadcaster or Public Communicator: The CBC Goes Online

by
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A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Journalism

School of Journalism and Communication Studies

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Thesis Abstract

Since 1993, the CBC has produced content for the Internet, a medium that could help the corporation to advance its mandate and become, not just a public broadcaster, but a forum to bring Canadians together online in new and creative ways. However, at the current time, this seems unlikely to happen because, beyond broad statements, the corporation has failed to articulate an inspired vision for online communications to match its past hopes in radio and television. This has been due to the lack of government policy to encourage the CBC's online content, the lack of discussion about online media by senior management of the CBC or of a clear leader to represent new media, internal disagreements about the role of the Internet, less concern that CBC New Media should "protect" Canadians from American content than was the case with radio and television, and the lack of a unified structure connecting all new media producers in the CBC. The result is that, while it has developed online content that has been professional, responsible and innovative, the future of CBC's new media operations lacks focus and vision.

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An organization like the CBC is absolutely essential, because the country is wide and its population is small and scarce. The CBC is like our circulation system.

Roch Carrier – author and National Librarian of Canada¹

The CBC building in Vancouver is a lot like Mother Corp. itself — there are hints it was once ahead of its time, but is now painfully out of date. Behind concrete walls journalists and entertainers turn out the tried-and-true product that has ensured a stagnant audience, eroded not by strong competition, but from the most natural of all adversaries: death.²

Liam Mitchell – student, The School of Journalism, University of British Columbia

Think how much faster and more efficient the Internet could be if instead of always connecting you to a central server every time you click on to a Website, your computer would find the source that housed that information nearest to you - if it's already on the computer of the kid down the hall, why travel halfway around the world to retrieve it?

Shawn Fanning – college drop-out, founder and inventor of *Napster*³

¹ Carrier, Roch. *Bringing the Rainbow into the House: Multiculturalism in Canada*. lecture presented at the Inter-American Development Bank in Washington, D.C. on February 2, 2001. [<http://www.nlc-bnc.ca/10/6/a6-3001-e.html>]

² Mitchell, Liam. *120 seconds on Sept. 11*. UBC Journalism Review Thunderbird Online Magazine. October 2001. [<http://www.journalism.ubc.ca/thunderbird/2001-02/october/120seconds.html>]

³ Fanning, Shawn. *Testimony of Shawn Fanning, Founder, Napster Inc. Before the Senate Judiciary Committee, Provo, Utah. October 9, 2000*. [www.Napster.com/pressroom/0013.html]

PART 1 – INTRODUCTION AND THESIS

Sarah Morris is experiencing technical difficulties.

However, after a few keystrokes and clicks of her computer mouse, she gets things back on track and goes on with this live production at the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's broadcast centre in Toronto. No panic, no posting of "one moment please" graphics – just a few words to a colleague at the computer beside her and on with the show.

Morris' job is quite different from that of most other journalistic staff at the CBC. She doesn't write or edit scripts, conduct interviews, shoot video or work in a large busy office. Morris is the moderator of the chat room for CBC's main Web site, cbc.ca.

"I don't know what it's like to do radio or TV," says the recent journalism graduate from Ryerson University in Toronto. "My parents don't really get it. They know in theory what I do, that I do chats for CBC. My friends have a better understanding, but people from my class who aren't Web savvy don't always get it."⁴

Morris is not alone. Other new media workers at the CBC also talk about whether their broadcast colleagues "get" the potential for the Internet to be a medium unto itself – regarded with the same possibilities as radio and television. Many of these people feel the Internet offers enormous opportunities that few people would have predicted a decade ago. In the early days of the Internet, the

⁴ Morris, Sarah – interview February 15, 2001

CBC seized some of those opportunities and became the first national broadcaster in the world to place sound files and stream audio onto the Internet. More recently, however, it appears that new media at the CBC may be missing opportunities to be innovative because of disagreement about the corporation's future role on the Internet and because of a shift in the view that some senior officials at the corporation have of online communications. Telling this story and putting the CBC's standards and actions in context make up the framework for this paper.

The central thesis to be argued here is that the Internet is a medium that could help the CBC to advance its mandate to be, not just a public broadcaster, but a forum to bring Canadians together online in new and creative ways. However, at the current time, this seems unlikely to happen because, beyond broad statements, the corporation has failed to articulate the kind of inspired vision for its role in online communications that it has in the past regarding radio and television..

The result is that, while it has developed online content that has been professional, responsible and innovative, the future of CBC's new media operations lacks focus and vision. For a corporation that spends so much effort explaining and promoting its actions to the country, CBC's uninspiring vision of new media appears to be due to several factors.

First, there is the public policy environment that surrounds the CBC. The corporation has faced little outside pressure to be an online leader in Canada, and ever since the corporation first experimented with online media in 1993, there have been few statements or actions from the federal government to encourage the CBC to develop its operations on the Internet.

Second, when compared to the issues concerning CBC Radio and Television, there has been little discussion about online media by senior management at the CBC, particularly during the early development of the Internet. This was due, in part, to financial cuts that were taking place in the corporation at the same time.

Third, new media development has taken place during a time when the CBC and the government appear less concerned that the corporation take on the role of “protecting” Canadians from American content – a role that was a more important factor in the development of the corporation’s radio and television services.

Fourth, there have been disagreements in the corporation between those who view the Internet as a unique new medium with its own possibilities for expression and those who have see it as either just another platform by which to deliver traditional content and publicity, or as a means by which to generate revenue for the corporation.

Fifth, the CBC, so far, has failed to create a common link or ethic between all producers of online content at the corporation’s online operations – particularly between those at cbc.ca and its Radio 3 operation – and has yet to appoint a leader of new media whose position in the corporation carries any power similar to that possessed by the Vice-Presidents of the other media services.

Finally, the CBC’s journalistic practices and the view of the Internet that is held by its leaders may have limited its ability to consider a new and more interactive online role for the corporation – a role that could require the CBC to rethink the kinds of public services that it provides to Canadians.

This is a story worth telling because the CBC is a publicly funded body whose television and radio operations have received extensive examination by government and media over the years, but whose online work is new enough that it has received little scrutiny so far. It is difficult for Canadians and their representatives to assess the value of CBC's presence on the Internet and the future direction for the service with such little public discussion of the corporation's goals for its online work.

The 11 chapters that follow cover six main areas.

Parts two and three explain the development of online communications in Canada and how the CBC was a pioneer in the early development of placing audio files on the Internet. In order to provide some background for the thesis, these chapters consist of more anecdote than analysis, as they set the scene of the online environment that the CBC joined in Canada.

Parts four and five lay out the background behind the corporation's decision to develop online media at a time when it was cutting its other media services and compare the role that former CBC president Perrin Beatty played in this direction with the view of online media that since has been adopted by the CBC's current president, Robert Rabinovitch.

Part six examines the historic role of the CBC as a producer of Canadian content and the reasons why its new media operations could have difficulty fulfilling such a role. It is followed by part seven, which outlines the shift that these operations have undergone with respect to marketing and goals to raise revenue for the corporation.

Parts eight and nine go inside the CBC. Part eight explains how the corporation has developed online services in two separate regions with separate goals and part nine compares the development of online new media with that of radio and television, examining the internal debate at CBC about whether the Internet is a unique medium, separate from radio and television.

Part 10 turns to analysis of the CBC's new media operations by people outside the corporation, including their views on both the current state of the CBC's online work and the role that they feel the corporation could play in the future Canadian media landscape.

Finally, in part 11, the paper examines what the CBC might learn by examining the use of peer-to-peer file sharing technologies such as *Napster*. It proposes that considering new uses of such technology might be one way for the CBC to rethink its public service role and might help to transform it from a public broadcaster into a public communications facility

There are several things that this paper will not do.

First, it will not, with one or two minor exceptions, deal with media outside of the English language. Just as *Radio-Canada* is a different institution for francophones in Canada than CBC is for anglophones, so too are its online operations. These topics could be the subject of a separate thesis.

Second, in order to focus on the CBC, it will not assess the online operations of other Canadian media, nor will it go into great detail about the Internet activities of other public broadcasters around the world. While both areas

of study would provide greater context in which to view the actions and vision of the CBC, each could be the subject of a separate paper.

Third, this paper will not provide a sort of "experts guide" on the technical and journalistic nuts and bolts of how the public broadcaster's Web site has been built and maintained over the years. Most of those interviewed for the paper feel the CBC's main site, cbc.ca, has become a professional product that will continue to evolve over time. Rather than assess its online craft, the goal here is to assess the history, principles and potential of the CBC's work on the Internet and to explain how these ideas and actions concerning new media reflect the direction of the corporation.

Black and white conclusions about CBC's online work are difficult to reach for several reasons. The modern version of the Internet is barely a decade old, meaning that the CBC and other Canadian media providers feel that they have yet to realize its full potential in serving Canadians. Measurement of Internet use is also difficult to assess, given the medium's youth, its constant evolution and the lack of established patterns for its users. Another challenge to such conclusions is the CBC's past as a crown corporation whose success has been defined, not only by traditional market means such as ratings or generation of revenue, but also by shifting policy goals of different Canadian governments over the years. Finally, also due to the newness of the Internet, there is little literature, either empirical or anecdotal, that assesses the CBC's online work. The result is that the main assessments of this paper are based on interviews with people familiar with the online work of the CBC.

PART 2 – LOGGING ON, EH?: CANADA GOES ONLINE

“We are in the early stages of a broadband revolution and, like every revolutionary movement, the ground has already been prepared,” reads the opening line of the report of the federal government’s National Broadband Advisory Taskforce.⁵

Such lofty phrases are common by those writing about the Internet, but the history of the data networking shows how the early days of online communication were less than glamorous.

In order to understand the development of the CBC’s online services, it is first helpful to understand something about the development of the physical network of the Internet in Canada and how this influenced the way that online communications were first perceived in the country. To demonstrate how basic these communications tools were less than two decades ago, author and York University professor Paul Hoffert illustrates how on-screen communication might have looked during the early days of the Internet.⁶

Can you read this?

>Can’t read. Let me change some settings.

How about now? [Repeat the foregoing about five times.]

>Read you loud and clear.

This is cool, eh?

⁵ National Broadband Task Force. *Report of the National Broadband Task Force*. executive summary.
[http://broadband.gc.ca/Broadband-document/english/table_content.htm]

⁶ Hoffert, Paul. *All Together Now*. p. 122

>Yes. Do you have any new games?

I'm sending one now. It should take about an hour and a half.

>Cool.

It may have been “cool” to early computer networking enthusiasts, but their numbers were small and the new form of communications they were using had not yet grabbed the attention of senior management at the CBC.

In a remarkably short period of time, that changed. The Internet now reaches over 60 per cent Canadian households⁷ and is expected to reach over three-quarters of such homes by 2003.⁸ To understand CBC's evolution online, one needs to understand the birth and development of the Internet in Canada.

The technical origins of data networks reach back to Paul Baran, a civilian consultant to the American military, and Donald Davies, a British computer scientist. The two had different goals – Baran wanted to create a communications system in the United States which lacked a central node that could be vulnerable to a nuclear attack while Davies was searching for a way to create more efficient use of sharing time on British mainframe computers – but each conceived of a system of data transmission known as “packet switching.”⁹ The packet switching model replaced the traditional practice of exchanged information via a group of “dumb” terminals linked to a central mainframe computer. On this continent, Baran's idea

⁷ Industry Canada. *Internet Use in Canada*.
[<http://retailinteractive.ca/SSG/ri00121e.html>]

⁸ Ellis, David. – interview May 11, 2001

⁹ Abbate, Janet. *Inventing the Internet*. 1999. p. 17

spawned two major data networks in the United States: the military's Advanced Research Products Agency or ARPAnet and The National Science Foundation's NSFnet, which linked researchers at several American universities.¹⁰

The early days of computer networking in Canada began with a collection of university engineers and administrators whose goal was to build computer networks for administering distant campuses and for connecting scientists across the country. Far from being a bunch of "techies," many of these early Canadian researchers were very conscious of their Canadian heritage, the same heritage that played so much a part in the mandate of the country's national broadcaster. While some of the scientists did want to connect to the American computer networks that were expanding rapidly in the 1970s and 80s, others argued that construction of data networks needed to be viewed with the same nationalist vision that had been behind construction of Canada's transportation and broadcast networks. This was reflected in a 1971 document published by the Science Council of Canada, which advocated the concept of what later became known as the information highway.

We have a long tradition of creating nationwide network links for national survival and unity. In the past we have created the CPR, the CBC and Air Canada. Some of these links carry goods, others carry information, ideas and values. Each required a sustained national effort and substantial leadership by the Government of Canada, often in the form of a crown corporation. Each has been a major factor in building national unity and in balancing north-south pulls of continentalism with a heavy concern for national goals, and at the same time, has built up a strong and valuable Canadian industry. The Trans-Canada Computer Communications Network (TCCN) is in fact the newest potential member of these national links.¹¹

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 193

¹¹ Science Council of Canada. *"A Trans-Canada Computer Communications Network."* CANet Institute. *A Nation Goes Online.* p.16.

As development of computer networks increased in the early 1980s, interest in developing computer networks moved beyond Canadian universities and into the military and in October of 1983, the Canadian Department of National Defence launched *DREnet*, the Defence Research Establishment Network, a project to link military computer networks in Canada with those in the United States. A decade later, the institution that helped set up *DREnet* – the federal government's Communications Research Centre, just west of Ottawa – would launch the first Internet content of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

Also during the eighties, researchers and provincial departments of education launched several projects to create electronic “backbones” to link universities in the various provinces. *CDNnet* was launched in 1981 to link Canada's scientific researchers and on Nov. 7, 1985, *NetNorth*, a network linking 13 universities and The National Research Council, was launched in Edmonton. The day's events demonstrated that nationalism already was part of the publicity surrounding the Internet: since the day also marked the 100th anniversary of the driving of the Canadian Pacific Railroad's famous last spike, those preparing the ceremony for the launch of *NetNorth* arranged that it be carried out in front of a giant photo of Lord Strathcona hammering the last spike of the CPR.¹²

The term “information highway” grew out of numerous comparisons between transportation and communications systems¹³: just as the speed of transportation was a measurement of the development of transportations, the speed

¹² CANet Institute. *A Nation Goes Online*. Ottawa: CANet Institute (a program of CANARIE). 2001. p. 57 [<http://www.canarie.ca/press/ango.html>]

¹³ Ibid. p.4

of information networks emerged as a way to measure their progress. By that yardstick, progress was evident, though basic by today's standards: in 1985, *NetNorth*'s main lines had a bandwidth that carried a maximum of 9,600 bits per second, making them good for transferring simple text, but not much else. In comparison, the average DSL high-speed home Internet connection today runs at about one hundred times that rate.¹⁴

Even in the early days of the Internet, however, the sense of "connectedness" was powerful for those with access to it. It was "such an enormous improvement over trying to do things by conventional mail and phone calls. Just being able to ship messages and get an answer back in minutes – it blew me away," remembers Roger Taylor, who worked in a physics lab at The National Research Council in Ottawa. "Yes, going from *NetNorth* to what we have now is nice, but it hasn't made the same difference to my life as that step from no net to *NetNorth*."¹⁵

Network connections between various institutions continued to build through the late eighties, culminating with the launch in 1990 of *CA*net*, formed by 10 regional networks as a national Canadian backbone with direct connection to *NSFnet* in the United States. As communications specialists working with the military accepted the need for north-south computer connections to defence sites in the United States, those in the university and research community in Canada held to the notion from 1971: that while it might have been cheaper for each region to simply arrange for network

¹⁴ Ibid. p.58

¹⁵ Ibid. p.58

connections to nearby American cities, the country needed an east-west data network to link Canadians. The federal government certainly felt that way: the conditions it placed on the money it contributed to constructing such networks encouraged pan-Canadian data transmission,¹⁶ but according to Gerry Miller, the chair of *CA*Net*, support for east-west links came also from the researchers' sense of how the new medium should develop in this country.

We simply felt it was important to develop the Internet in Canada on a Canadian network. I don't think Canadian traffic should have to go through the U.S. Sure, there are network efficiencies to keeping traffic in Canada, but that's not really a big deal. It's a nationalist argument. It was important to maintain a Canadian identity because if you have regional networks stitched to the U.S., then effectively we just become an extension of the U.S.¹⁷

While universities and the military dominated the official use of computer networks, individual users were hooking up to what was sometimes referred to as "the poor man's ARPAnet" – more commonly known as Usenets.¹⁸ Prior to the availability of commercial Internet service providers (ISPs) that could provide simple access to both e-mail and the Internet, home computer users used these electronic bulletin boards to transfer data over regular phone lines. Such connections lacked the more sophisticated packet switching or network protocols of larger networks, but they often reflected more of the culture that would later characterize mass use of the Internet. David Ellis runs Omnia Communications –

¹⁶ Ibid. p.110

¹⁷ Ibid. p.83

¹⁸ Ibid. p.37

he's an independent analyst who has been a CBC consultant and who co-wrote *A Nation Goes Online*, a history of the Internet in Canada published by *The CANet Institute*, part of the Canadian Network for the Advancement of Research, Industry and Education, or CANARIE. Ellis writes that Usenets "demonstrated the power of online communities to serve as a resource, as recreation and as a way of drawing people from every walk of life into the vagaries of Net culture."¹⁹

By the end of the decade, major developments opened up the Internet both inside and outside Canada. In November 1989, the Nova Scotia Technology Network (NSTN) was incorporated to provide Internet access in the province, becoming the first commercial Internet service provider in the country. Still, at a time when personal computer manufacturers were developing machines that simplified user tasks, the Internet remained accessible mostly to those with the knowledge and interest to navigate it. Exchanging file transfer protocol, or FTPs, required that users have precise codes of where they wanted to find or send data. As Ellis points out, having access to the Internet was one thing, but being able to use it was another.

The Internet in 1990 was like a fantastically large library with thousands upon thousands of documents and no card catalogue. For the most part, Internet veterans from the 1980s knew what resources they were looking for and where to find them. Staying up to date with what was available on the Network had been, for them, a manageable task: if you didn't know where a resource was, you simply asked a colleague or posted a public query on a newsgroup. On the other hand, despite great strides made by CA*net in making the physical network more accessible, "newbies" online for the first time had no idea where to begin.²⁰

¹⁹ Ibid. p.42

²⁰ Ibid. p.104

In the early nineties, this changed because of the creation of new tools to navigate the Internet – tools that would help the development of the World Wide Web. In 1990, three researchers at McGill University developed *Archie*, a computer program that helped users locate files on the Internet and the first application written and deployed specifically to provide a general service for the entire Internet community.²¹ At roughly the same time, researchers at the University of Wisconsin had developed a similar program called *Gopher*.²² The release of these tools was followed by the release in November 1993 of the Internet browser *Mosaic*. It was a system developed by American scientists at The National Centre for Supercomputer Applications (who later took their innovation into the private sector and founded the Internet browser company *Netscape*) and it quickly became the missing card catalogue to which Ellis refers. In the first month after its release, over 40,000 copies of *Mosaic* were downloaded, and within four months over a million users were estimated to have the program.²³

Also in the early nineties, scientists at the Conseil Européen pour la Recherche Nucléaire, or CERN, developed an Internet application to link computer files around the globe through a common language known as hypertext mark-up language, or HTML. The person often cited as the main influence behind this process was CERN's Tim Berners-Lee, whose creation of hypertext links made it possible for average computers users to travel from one piece of online information

²¹ Ibid. p. 105

²² Abbate, Janet. Op. Cit. p. 213

²³ Ibid. p. 217

to another without having to have a skills in computer programming.²⁴ Historian Janet Abbate notes that the result, which became know as the World Wide Web, “changed people’s perception of the Internet: instead of being seen as a research tool or even a conduit for messages between people, the Network took on new roles as an entertainment medium, a shop window, and a vehicle for presenting one’s persona to the world.”²⁵ Within five years, the Web would surpass FTP as the most popular vehicle for accessing information Internet.²⁶

With the growth of new ways to use the Internet, the Canadian government became more interested in it and it undertook several programs to promote the country’s involvement with the Internet. In March 1993, CANARIE was established as a non-profit corporation with the goal of developing a communications infrastructure in Canada to improve the country's competitiveness in the information technologies. In October of the same year, *SchoolNet*, a cooperative program of the federal and provincial governments and the private sector, was launched with a mission to connect elementary and secondary schools to the Internet. Then, in April of 1994, Industry Minister John Manley announced the formation of the Information Highway Advisory Council (IHAC) to examine the communications infrastructure in Canada and suggest how the government could accommodate increased use of data networks in the country.²⁷

²⁴ Ibid. p. 214

²⁵ Ibid. p. 214

²⁶ Ibid. p. 215

²⁷ Carroll, Jim, Broadhead, Rick. *Canadian Internet Handbook 1995 Edition*. p. 53

While it received a great deal of coverage and was portrayed as having the potential to supply the blueprint for government action concerning online communications, IHAC's final report of 1996 focussed mostly on networks and access to them, but contained few specifics about how the government should view the role of bodies such as the CBC in contributing to the information highway. The authors of the report indicated in their remarks concerning Canadian content that they were aware the CBC had both developed a Web site and was uploading audio to the Internet, but their knowledge of it appeared minimal and their recommendations of how to view the online efforts of the CBC were both brief and vague.

Given the need to generate and promote more Canadian content for the Information Highway and recognizing the success of CBC Radio in exploiting this new medium, the Council recommends that the federal government utilize Canadian national cultural institutions to generate new services and products for the Information Highway.²⁸

Universities and government agencies weren't the only bodies examining online communications in Canada. Just as CANARIE was emerging inside of the government, grass-roots ventures known as "freenets" emerged in communities such as Ottawa and Victoria. These text-based online networks gave many computer users in these regions their first chance to get on the Internet and they would prove more popular than their creators had expected. One of the most notable was the National Capital Freenet, an idea hatched in the early nineties by staff at Carleton University. Jay Weston and George Frajkor, both Carleton

²⁸ Information Highway Advisory Council. *Preparing Canada for a Digital World: Final Report of the Information Highway Advisory Council*. recommendation 5.8. 1997. [<http://strategis.ic.gc.ca/SSG/ih01650e.html>]

professors, modelled the NCF on an online community called The Cleveland Freenet and with help from Dave Sutherland – then the director of computing services at Carleton – they established the NCF to serve people in Ottawa from a server based in the university administration's computer room.²⁹ Membership in the NCF took off immediately and while some people joined to use the freenet's online discussion groups, Sutherland says most people joined it to access the Internet.³⁰ Although the NCF's limited server capacity meant that many of its members had to endure long waits to connect to the service, the phenomenon showed that people were hungry to use this new network technology. As these users became so comfortable with online communication that the freenet no longer met their expectations, they signed up with new private companies that had emerged to provide faster access to the Net through paid subscriptions.³¹

Operations such as the NCF may have had little direct effect on the new media services provided later by content providers such as the CBC, but their legacy was to encourage thousands of computer users to embrace online communications in the early stage of the Internet's evolution in Canada. Many people who have influenced policy concerning online communications in Canada had their first taste of it via services such as the NCF.³² Possibly more important to the CBC, many of those in Ottawa who helped to put the CBC online (the subject

²⁹ Sutherland, David – interview October 9, 2001

³⁰ Sutherland, David – interview October 9, 2001

³¹ Sutherland, David – interview October 9, 2001

³² Binder, Michael – interview April 19, 2001

of the next chapter) made their first home connection to the Internet through the NCF and were inspired by the results of the experience.³³ In that sense, the NCF played an introductory role to those who helped put both Canada and the CBC on the Internet.

The interest in the Net generated by groups such as the NCF, however, appears to have done little to prompt government officials in Ottawa to consider a link between online communications and cultural agencies such as the CBC. Simon Fraser University professor Donald Gutstein argues that the government was more concerned with the “pipes” of the information highway than with its content because Canada’s development of online media was dominated by private sector interests whose goals were to promote e-commerce and build Internet business connections more than they were to see Canadian content and culture on the Net. Gutstein feels this was why CANARIE initially focussed on building infrastructure rather than making the Net accessible to as many Canadians as possible. He also believes that IHAC contributed to this strategy by holding its hearings in private, as compared to the public commissions – such as Aird and Massey – that helped to develop radio and television in Canada.

More than 2,000 people volunteered to sit on IHAC, but the thirty (Industry minister John) Manley chose included few surprises. Nine were, or became, directors of CANARIE. The private sector outnumbered the public eighteen to twelve. The largest contingent – eight members, or more than 25 per cent – came from the telecommunications industry, two from broadcasting, and two from computing. The pattern of CANARIE was repeated – the private sector would dominate, and telecommunications would be the first among equals. IHAC was to hold its meetings in secret, and originally Manley did not intend to release its final report to the public, an approach he tried often to repeat.³⁴

³³ Patrick, Andrew – interview April 30, 2001

In contrast to Gutstein's views are those of Michael Binder, Industry Canada's assistant deputy minister for Spectrum, Information Technologies and Telecommunications. A key advisor to Manley regarding online policy, Binder was the government official who supervised both IHAC and the government's recent Broadband Advisory Task Force. He is passionate and open about his belief in the ability of private companies to drive the development of online communications in the country.

"We have a belief in free enterprise to develop networks. We want them to be lean mean profit machines to generate the jobs and develop R and D," he says, noting that online networks have been treated more as means of communication than as media in and of themselves. Given the uncertainty that existed around these networks in their early days, Binder says it is little surprise that government needed to convince businesses that something such as the Internet would prove to be profitable.³⁵

"Back in 89 and 90, I was going door to door try to sell people on a new technology," says Binder. "You know what it was? E-mail! I went to Bell and told them they needed to develop an e-mail system, and they came back to us and said 'it's all very nice but it's not our core business'."³⁶

³⁴ Gutstein, Donald. *e.con: How the Internet Undermines Democracy*. 1999. p. 115

³⁵ Binder, Michael – interview April 19, 2001

³⁶ Binder, Michael – interview April 19, 2001

That soon would change, but in the early nineties, the Internet was just reaching the masses through the release of browsers such as *Mosaic*. In late 1993, when *Mosaic* was released, Web sites were rare, terms such as “dot.com,” and “surfing” were just emerging and most important for the CBC, cyber sites for Canadian media of any sort were almost non-existent: it was not until in March of 1996 that the Canadian Online Explorer, or CANOE, was launched, bringing online Canadian newspapers such as *The Financial Post* and those in the *Sun* chain.³⁷ These services emerged into a virtual vacuum in government policy concerning the cultural or social implications of online communications – a situation that Binder says was not caused because the government didn’t care about content, but because it had to concentrate first on creating the nuts and bolts of the information highway.³⁸

If federal officials were on the steep learning curve about the Internet that Binder claims they were, and if the federal government’s focus was on the construction of communications infrastructure rather than on the social effects such networks might create, it is little wonder that there was little public policy to help guide organizations such as the CBC in entering the online world. It is also, then, understandable that there was little consideration about the potential impact of the CBC placing its content on the Internet, or the role, if any, that the corporation might play in the development of online communications in Canada.

³⁷ Carroll, Jim. *Canadian Internet Timeline*. Media Awareness Network. [<http://www.media-awareness.ca/eng/indus/internet/timeline.htm>]

³⁸ Binder, Michael – interview April 19, 2001

It was against this backdrop that a small group of people in the Canadian government and the CBC would embrace a new medium, hoping to figure out its social and cultural implications as they went along.

PART 3 – SKUNK WORKS: CBC GETS ON THE NET

Just as the creation of the Internet itself was a unique media phenomenon, the creation of CBC's online service was different from the development of the corporation's radio and television services (a topic to be discussed more in a later chapter). Outlining the origins of the CBC's online services helps to explain both the innovation that put the CBC on the Internet and how the online service's low profile contributed to a lack of commitment to new media on the part of many managers in the corporation.

The arrival of radio and television operations at the CBC emerged from various government investigations whose objectives have been chronicled by communications historians and scholars such as E. Austin Weir, Paul Rutherford, Frank Peers, Marc Raboy and Knowlton Nash. The arrival of online operations took place with little fanfare and a fair amount of experimentation by a small group of people in the federal government and at the CBC. There was no ribbon cutting, no public relations campaign, no audience research about who might use it and, initially, almost no budget.

The story starts with Andrew Stephens. Today, he is Director of IT Architecture for Industry Canada, but in 1993, he was a policy and applications specialist with the federal Department of Communications. The dry title betrayed his work – Stephens says he was, in effect, a government Internet surfer. An early online enthusiast, his job was to explore the new medium for the Canadian government and to help to launch experimental Web sites.

“My head was exploding at the time,” he says. “At that point I was launching one of these every three months, the first government portal, the first health portal, government-wide search tools. It was the wild west in cyber space.”³⁹

In April of 1993, Stephens attended a conference in Washington D.C. where he met one of the Internet’s best-known innovators, American technology writer Carl Malamud. Malamud produced a show titled *Geek of the Week* on a unique Web-based audio provider called the Internet Multicasting Service, and Stephens came home from the meeting with an idea that the Canadian government could create a Web page that would include sound files.

At the same time, two scientists at the federal government’s Communications Research Centre (CRC), Andrew Patrick and Thomas Whalen, had developed the technology to do just that, but they had been largely unsuccessful in interesting Canadian broadcasters in their project. As the scientists reported to Stephens’ department, they learned of his idea and when the team met with Stephens, he suggested what he saw as a prime source for Canadian audio content to place on the site: the CBC.

“I thought the CBC has content galore, years and years of it” says Stephens, “I just figured do it, go big. Who were the biggest content people around and might be willing to take a flyer on it?”⁴⁰

Stephens says he already had approached CKCU – the student radio station at Carleton University in Ottawa – with the idea of uploading its sound files, but

³⁹ Stephens, Andrew – interview February 22, 2001

⁴⁰ Stephens, Andrew – interview February 22, 2001

had been turned down. After getting together with Patrick and Whalen, he then worked through government contacts to arrange a meeting in Ottawa with Norm Bolen, then the program director for the CBC's Ontario operations.

"My view has never changed from the first day I saw the World Wide Web," says Bolen, who today runs The History Channel for Atlantic Alliance. "I could see its potential as a distribution medium for information, but like everybody, I underestimated how fast it would grow."⁴¹

Recognizing that Stephens would have to speak with someone in the corporation who understood what CBC content could be used on the Net, Bolen referred him to Diane Williamson. Today, Williamson manages her own Internet consulting firm, but in 1993, she was the manager for the *Radioworks* marketing arm of the corporation. Just as important, however, was Williamson's own interest in the Internet. Stephens says she "got it right away,"⁴² and Williamson admits that she stretched her authority in giving the green light for the CBC to ship show tapes to the DOC scientists building this new audio Web site.

"I said let's start with news – we own the news. And Alan Maitland was a staff announcer so Alan Maitland material was owned by the CBC," she says, referring to story readings that the legendary co-host of *As it Happens* had recorded under the name of "Fireside Al."⁴³

⁴¹ Bolen, Norm – interview April 12, 2001

⁴² Stephens, Andrew – interview February 22, 2001

⁴³ Williamson, Diane – interview March 15, 2001

So it started on Dec. 15, 1993. Staff in Williamson's office sent tapes of programs to Patrick and Whalen, who dubbed them into a computer and placed them on a CRC site they operated that was known as "debra", (named after Whalen's daughter).⁴⁴ The site could be accessed by users in three ways: through a file transfer method known as FTP, using the American search system *Gopher*, or via programs such as *Mosaic*, which could access the relatively new system known as the World Wide Web. Announcements of the service were posted in various Usenet newsgroups and six days after the start of the trial, the CBC and Industry Canada announced, in a joint press release, that they had "taken the first step in making CBC Radio programming available over something called the Internet global communications network." For the many who had yet to log on to the Net, the release explained that the Internet was "an international link for various domestic computer networks."⁴⁵

The content available included Christmas readings by Maitland, edited portions of the science program *Quirks and Quarks*, and an episode of the radio program *Ideas*. Users were encouraged to comment on the site through e-mail, and many suggested that the site be expanded to include more programs and more current material.⁴⁶ This prompted Patrick and Whelan to look for a way to obtain daily segments of CBC Radio news that could be placed on the site. Their solution was simple.

⁴⁴ Whalen, Thomas – interview January 12, 2001

⁴⁵ Williamson, Diane – interview March 15, 2001

⁴⁶ Patrick, Andrew S., Whalen, Thomas E. *CBC Radio on the Internet: An Experiment in Convergence*. Canadian Journal of Communication p. 2

"We decided we could capture material in a timely matter if we had a feed from the CBC, so we contacted the CBC and said we need a receiver," says Patrick.

"They went to Radio Shack and found one, we stuck it in the lab, taped an antennae to the window and programmed the computer to wake up for certain amounts of time, digitize what was there and make it available on the Web site."⁴⁷

Today, Patrick works with The National Research Council in Ottawa. Looking back on the CBC project, he says it was a classic case of what technology workers call "skunk works" – projects that are given few resources and often little publicity but which allow engineers to experiment with an idea outside the normal project chain. While such experimentation wasn't revolutionary to scientists such as Patrick and Whalen, the results of this particular project did prove to be revolutionary for the CBC in two ways.

First, they aided in the launch of a new medium with a fraction of the publicity and discussion that had taken place with the arrival of other new CBC media in previous decades. When the CRBC, the predecessor to the CBC, launched its radio broadcasts, it did so with major events such as the 1932 Christmas Day address by King George V⁴⁸ and when CBC Television took to the air in September of 1952, it featured inauguration speeches by dignitaries such as Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent. Just over four decades later, the press release announcing the establishment of the "debra" Web site paled by comparison.

⁴⁷ Patrick, Andrew – interview April 30, 2001

⁴⁸ Nash, Knowlton. *The Microphone Wars: a history of triumph and betrayal at the CBC*. p. 95

Second, according to Patrick and Stephens, the project made the CBC a pioneer in posting audio content on the Internet. While many other online operations today may be larger than the CBC's, in terms of resources or number of users, Patrick and Stephens say their analysis of the Internet in 1993 shows that the CBC was the first national broadcaster in the world to put audio on the Net.⁴⁹ Even with rudimentary structure of the Internet in the early 1990s, and even though the slower networks of the day meant that a ten-minute CBC newscast could take more than twice that time to download, the results were encouraging.

"We started to get e-mail from ex-pat Canadians around the world who were using this as a way to keep track of Canadian news. Someone at a consulate in Australia said he could get more news about what's going on in Canada through this than in any other way," says Patrick.⁵⁰

"I recently moved to the San Francisco Bay Area and I am blown away by your service. Every day I'm able to listen to my beloved CBC Radio News (I was a CBC listener before moving) and preserve my Canadian identity," one listener e-mailed the researchers.⁵¹

Reaction to the site grew steadily. From a few hundred downloads in the initial days to a daily average of about 1,900 per day nine months later, use of the site continued to grow, totalling about 60,000 files accessed in total during the 10

⁴⁹ Patrick, Andrew – interview April 30, 2001
Stephens, Andrew – interview February 22, 2001

⁵⁰ Patrick, Andrew – interview April 30, 2001

⁵¹ Patrick, Andrew S., Whalen, Thomas E. Op. Cit. p. 2

month trial.⁵² This may seem trivial when compared to over six million page views that cbc.ca recorded in the year 2000, but at the time, it was substantial. Patrick says a contact he had with the Ontario government at the time told him the site was accounting for half of the Internet traffic leaving the province. “ There was no issue about trying to attract people,” he remembers, “even though it was all running below the radar at both CBC and CRC.”⁵³

If CBC content on the Web was below the radar, it wasn't because development of the Net wasn't well underway, nor was it because people in the CBC were unaware of its development. More likely, it was that the idea of the Web as a new medium had yet to be absorbed by most people in the corporation.

“There sort of became a community around the CBC of people who were interested in the Web – a manager, a couple of engineers, a producer here and there,” says Bob Kerr, the CBC technical manager who, with Diane Williamson, oversaw the development of the Web site run by the scientists at the CRC. Kerr says that it was the constant weekly growth in use of the site that convinced him that there was potential to this new medium and that it was time to trumpet this view inside the corporation. In early 1994, he arranged for Patrick to address a CBC management meeting where, he says, the scientist received a polite, but non-committal response to the idea of the corporation building a new media service.⁵⁴

⁵² Ibid. p. 3

⁵³ Patrick, Andrew – interview April 30, 2001

⁵⁴ Kerr, Bob – interview May 14, 2001

Patrick and Whalen concluded in mid-1994 that it was time to move to other projects and they removed CBC content from their site in the spring of 1995. By this time, Kerr had convinced CBC managers for the corporation to take over the site and, looking for someone to oversee the technical end of the project, he turned to Joe Lawlor. Lawlor was a CBC Radio studio technician who had become interested in the Internet and who was, by his own admission, “a real pest” in asking to be involved with CBC’s development of new media.⁵⁵

“Joe just caught the bug and I scrounged enough money to pay for half his salary and we got a little office space that nobody else wanted, close to radio master control, and in order to get content we ran some lines from there to this room and that’s how we got programming. It was audience driven – someone would say ‘can you make newscast available?’ sure, ‘can you archive it,’ sure.”⁵⁶

Despite the “can do” attitude of Kerr and Lawlor, taking over the project and embracing it were two different matters at the CBC. The site, established in August 1994 as www.radio.cbc.ca, remained a “skunk works” operation, with no actual budget of its own and relying largely on funds cobbled together by Kerr and Williamson. This was partly due to Williamson’s goal that the site would be a vehicle for the CBC to generate revenue and publicity, a principle noted in the report on the project written by Patrick and Whalen.

⁵⁵ Lawlor, Joe – interview April 12, 2001

⁵⁶ Kerr, Bob – interview May 14, 2001

CBC also offers a number of value-added products, such as audio tapes, CDs, T-shirts, books, transcripts, etc. It may be possible to increase sales in this area simply by making a catalogue of these products available on-line. There is a keen interest within CBC in making these products available over the Internet, and methods for electronic ordering and payments are being explored.⁵⁷

What this means is that, while the CBC may have been the first major broadcaster to get on the Internet, it did not launch the project as a vehicle for content. This is confirmed by Marlyn Persaud, the resource manager for cbc.ca, who was hired in 1995 to help Joe Lawlor revise the CBC site. In addition to maintaining an online mail-order catalogue on the site to sell CBC merchandise, Persaud says the main other content on it was programming schedules.

"It was seen as a vehicle for program promotion," she says. "It wasn't seen as anything more than that because nothing was happening on the Web."⁵⁸

With its primary role as a sort of electronic brochure, the CBC Web site attracted little attention in the corporation in 1995, gaining a reputation for being, as Lawlor calls it, "a mom and pop operation."⁵⁹ Few managers were familiar with the Internet and the staff that were experimenting with it in the corporation were so scattered that there was no critical mass to gain recognition for the potential of new medium. Norm Bolen remembers that CBC Television's *The Health Show* created a Web page and wanted to pour more resources into the site but lacked the finances to do so.⁶⁰ The staff at the Winnipeg-based show *Brand X* built a site and became

⁵⁷ Patrick, Andrew S., Whalen, Op. Cit. p. 5

⁵⁸ Persaud, Marlyn – interview February 16, 2001

⁵⁹ Lawlor, Joe – interview April 12, 2001

⁶⁰ Bolen, Norm – interview April 12.01

the first to register the URL "cbc.ca" – the site name that was transferred later to the corporation.⁶¹ There also were sites established in 1995 by regional radio staff in cities such as Halifax and Regina.⁶² However, the impact on management had yet to take place.

"In radio, some programs were busy developing home pages – often vanity home pages," says Alex Frame, the CBC's Vice-President of English Radio.

"When the Internet started to pop, it popped in a fragmentary way without any consciousness of senior management."⁶³

For those more involved with the project, this was both a blessing and a curse.

"They didn't order it be stopped, so that was their way of looking the other way," says Williamson of her superiors. "I don't think anybody wanted to hang their hat on it, and until it proved it was going to be some kind of success, they just kind of ignored it."⁶⁴

Williamson felt that success of the Web site required that it not be a financial drain on the corporation and she says that when the site failed to generate much revenue, Frame was "not supportive at all. He didn't believe in it and felt it

⁶¹ Lawlor, Joe – interview April 12, 2001

⁶² Doran, Hal – interview January 18, 2001

⁶³ Frame, Alex – interview Feb. 15, 2001

⁶⁴ Williamson, Diane – interview March 15, 2001

was costing us money. Whenever I would bring a report to meetings, it just didn't capture his attention."⁶⁵

From his vantage point, observing the growth of the Internet as part of his work, Andrew Stephens says the site did capture attention elsewhere.

"All it took was for the CBC to come online and every other broadcaster in the world had to look at it. Once the CBC was online, they'd thrown the switch," he says, noting that broadcasters such as the BBC soon followed the CBC's move to place audio content on the Internet.⁶⁶

Kerr says that, to be fair to CBC management, they did give him money to purchase a connection to the Internet, to install a new server computer and to allow Joe Lawlor to continue with his online work. This left Patrick and Whalen with the impression that "the CBC sees the Internet as a valuable method for expanding and enhancing their existing services, and they are more than willing to adopt this new technology."⁶⁷ Those inside the CBC, however, say there was little consciousness of the potential of the new service. It wasn't actually seen as a mass medium, but more of an experiment that might appeal to the minority of Canadian "techies" who were experimenting with the Internet.⁶⁸

The result of this is that the CBC and the Canadian government have all but overlooked the achievement of Stephens, Patrick, Whalen and others – that these people made the CBC the first national broadcaster to place audio content on the

⁶⁵ Williamson, Diane – interview March 15, 2001

⁶⁶ Stephens, Andrew – interview February 22, 2001

⁶⁷ Patrick, Andrew S., Whalen, Thomas E. Op. Cit. p. 5

⁶⁸ Lawlor, Joe – interview April 12, 2001

Net. This is why Patrick's description of the operation as "skunk works" fits so well – that it took place with few resources and little recognition.

In the end, no formal policy request had prompted the CBC to produce content for the Net – it had happened mostly as an experiment by government scientists – and even when the corporation took over the site, its development remained mostly unknown in the CBC. As Frame openly admits about the new media operation, "there was a long period where, for people preoccupied with the CBC's four main services, none of us really cared about it because the real story was someplace else."⁶⁹

That real story someplace else was the tightening of the CBC's finances – a development that would cast a pall over new media's arrival at the same time as financial cuts were striking at the corporation's main services.

⁶⁹ Frame, Alex – interview Feb. 15, 2001

PART 4 – HARD TO SWALLOW: HOW THE CBC BUILT AN ONLINE SERVICE AS IT CUT OTHER SERVICES

The lack of attention to new media by senior managers changed in 1995 with the arrival of a new president at the CBC, Perrin Beatty. Examining the belt-tightening environment into which Beatty introduced online media at the CBC illustrates both the determination of the new president to develop this form of communications and the reasons behind the lack of enthusiasm for new media in its early years.

The arrival of Beatty, a former federal cabinet minister from the government of Brian Mulroney, came at a difficult time for the CBC. In February 1995, finance minister Paul Martin presented a federal budget that outlined dramatic cuts for the corporation: from a parliamentary appropriation of just under \$1.1 billion in 1994–95, the budget outlined planned to reduce the CBC's government allowance by 25 per cent to \$839 million by 1997–98 (when the corporation's entire budget, including commercial revenue, was about \$1.1 billion).⁷⁰

Anthony Manera, President and CEO of the corporation at the time, delivered his letter of resignation to the Prime Minister's office the same day. While he cited personal reasons for the departure, Manera never hid the impact that the cut had in prompting his departure from the corporation.

"How can one be an effective leader if the troops can't rely on what he or she tells them?" Manera wrote later, noting that he had assured employees that

⁷⁰ Manera, Tony. *A dream betrayed: the battle for the CBC*. p. 187

previous funding reductions to the CBC by the Mulroney government would be the last the corporation would face for some time.⁷¹

On April 1 of that year, the position of President and CEO was taken over by Beatty, who had to oversee staff reductions that trimmed CBC staff from more than 10 thousand employees to a slightly more than seven thousand.⁷² When he arrived at the corporation, Beatty already was interested in the Internet and those who worked with him at the CBC remember his personal fascination with new technologies. Today, as President and CEO of Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters Association, a business group based in Ottawa, Beatty still argues that Canadian institutions must either face up to the rapid expansion of new technologies or get out of the way.

“The velocity of technological change is not going to slow down,” he says. “It took only four years for 50 million users to get on the Internet, and six years to get 100 million people. That number continues to grow at a dramatic pace. In contrast, it took 75 years from the time that Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone to when we had achieved 50 million users worldwide.”⁷³

In many of the media reports about Beatty's tenure at the CBC, the turmoil of the corporation's cuts combined with reports of a cool relationship between Beatty and Guylaine Saucier, Chair of the CBC's board of directors, led to negative assessments of his work at the corporation.

⁷¹ Ibid. p. 201

⁷² Beatty, Perrin – interview February 22, 2001

⁷³ Beatty, Perrin – interview February 22, 2001

“And what good came out of Manera's resignation? We are now saddled with the ineffective and unqualified Perrin Beatty,” wrote Gerald Pratley in a 1997 edition of the magazine *Kinema*.⁷⁴

Beatty, however, was both effective and qualified in prompting the development of new media. A personal interest in new technology gave him the background to challenge other CBC executives who knew little about new media. That, combined with his position at the top of the CBC, allowed Beatty to find development funds for the operation by taking them from “productivity improvements” in the corporation’s budget.⁷⁵

Until Beatty arrived with his vision of new media, a notable characteristic of online operations at the CBC was their near invisibility in the corporation. According to people such as Kerr, documents about the operation were few, official discussions by senior management were minimal and New Media wasn’t so much a planned operation as it was an experiment that consumed few noticeable resources.⁷⁶

Since the mid-nineties, one of the resources new media has consumed is the time and energy of Ken Wolff, executive producer of news for cbc.ca. A former producer with CBC Radio and CBC *Newsworld*, Wolff established the first Web

⁷⁴ Pratley, Gerald. *Twice on the CBC*. *Kinema*. Spring 1997.
[<http://www.arts.uwaterloo.ca/FINE/juhde/gp-pt971.htm>]

⁷⁵ Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission. *Transcripts of Proceedings for the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, CBC Licence Renewals*. 1999.

⁷⁶ Kerr, Bob – interview May 14, 2001

site for *Newsworld* in 1996. It was a site separate from the one operated by Lawlor and Persaud and separate from a site that had been set up by CBC Radio.

“There never was a meeting or a policy,” says Wolff. “It was just a bunch of us doing it. It’s always been a rump action run by people who care very passionately about the work they do.”⁷⁷

For people used to working in radio or television, that passion may have been difficult to spot. In the three areas of CBC’s Toronto broadcast centre that house new media producers, there are no lights, cameras or studios, nor do staff read scripts out loud or glance at a clock with minutes to go before show time. None of that matters to Wolff, who views the crew that produce online content as comparable with the young producers of the early 1970s who overhauled CBC Radio.

“CNN has newsrooms with over 300 people,” he says. “I’ve got just over 20. We do the best we can considering the resources.”

Those resources may not be what Wolff would like, but they’ve come some distance from the resources of new media in 1996. That was the year Beatty raised the profile of online work by creating a new media unit and hiring John Lewis, a CBC head office business manager, as its executive director. Beatty also allocated \$2 million to new media operations, something that Pierre Belanger, a communications professor at the University of Ottawa who worked as director of new media for Radio-Canada from 1998 to 2001, cites as a turning point.

⁷⁷ Wolff, Ken – interview March 7, 2002

“At head office, new media was mostly an abstract concept,” he says.

“When John (Lewis) came on board there was a pulling together of the new media forces and it was Perrin Beatty who made it happen.”⁷⁸

New funds for the online service still did not result in much new attention from senior managers for the CBC’s Internet activities, but did promote the expansion of services. Starting with CBC in Halifax, regional stations began to develop Web sites of text to tell listeners about their programs. Kerr recalls that managers from the television and radio services agreed, with some arm-twisting, to contribute minimal funds from their budgets to the development of Web sites, although few saw the efforts as more than experimental.⁷⁹ To study the online work, the corporation’s research department began to assemble data on use of the main CBC site by counting the number of page views recorded by the Web site server. This would show that between 1997 and 2000, the number of page views of cbc.ca would almost triple from 820,000 in 1997 to over six million in 2000. While people such as Bob Kerr admit that counting page views is a very basic way to measure use of a Web site, he adds that there was the sense inside the CBC that the Web site was attracting a steady stream of new users.⁸⁰

Perrin Beatty remained convinced the CBC had a future on the Internet, whatever its costs. One event that reinforced his convictions took place on June 2, 1997, the night of the federal election. John Lewis recalls the story.

⁷⁸ Belanger, Pierre – interview January 14, 2002

⁷⁹ Kerr, Bob – interview May 14, 2001

⁸⁰ Kerr, Bob – interview May 14 2001

One of our reporters in Mexico had been invited to the Canadian embassy for the evening to watch the elections results. She e-mailed us that she got there and it was the usual cocktail thing, with people standing around, and they could get the *Anik* satellite feed so they had CBC English on the television. Just as they started to have a second drink and a few things to eat, they lost the signal. So there they are in a room, a big group of people, and somebody in the back says, "Hey, CBC has a Web site, who's got a computer? Why don't we set it up?" So they did, with a little 14-inch screen beside the TV. Then they got some TV signal back, so there you had this perfect little lab: the digital signal and the analog signal. She (the CBC reporter) said that overwhelmingly, the group of people in the room went to the digital signal. The reason they did it was because they could individually access the content they wanted, they could go to their own riding results that meant something to them. That struck home and was a real mover, so we went straight to the president's office to say, 'look this is the power.' It showed that personal interaction was the guts of the power.⁸¹

That same year, Beatty raised many eyebrows in the corporation when he hiked the new media budget to about \$12 million and added a plan to increase it annually so that it would reach two per cent of the CBC's \$1.1-billion operating budget by the end of the decade.⁸² The increased funds helped to expand the various CBC Web sites and Ken Wolff says the new resources allowed him to make the *Newsworld* site more current and more reflective of the news flow of the day. He remembers the time with pride.

It was thought of as one of the best news sites in 97/98 – one of the few that had audio and video, our page views were very high and the press always talked about it being a good site. The only criticism was that maybe the CBC shouldn't be spending money on new media.⁸³

There was, however, one issue about the new media operations that concerned John Lewis. He was fed up with the collection of Web sites growing

⁸¹ Lewis, John – interview January 12, 2001

⁸² Lewis, John – interview January 12, 2001

⁸³ Wolff, Ken – interview March 7, 2002

from different CBC programs and in the different locations. He recalls meeting with producers from CBC Radio, CBC Television and *Newsworld*.

All three had their own news sites and I said “guys, look, CBC’s going to have three news sites?” and they all nodded their heads yes. It wasn’t until we got audience feedback where people said, “What are you doing? All I want is CBC news, not *Newsworld* news, radio news and television news.” Now, it’s the same site, just different windows, but it took massive negotiation to get them to agree on that.⁸⁴

Wolff admits that the issue was one that took some time to settle. “News slowly got together, but for some time, it was still not a unified group,” he says. “The problem was that *Newsworld* wanted its own site and so did CBC.”

Mark Hyland left his job doing Web site development at Shift magazine to join the CBC in 1997 – another person hired with the new funds the corporation put into its online services. Hyland recalls working with “a pretty vague mandate,” but remembers that one of his priorities was to merge the *Newsworld*, CBC Radio and CBC Television sites into a single online entity.

“The news was the news and we knew that if we fragmented our efforts among different brands, we wouldn’t achieve much because it would be hard for users to know where to go. We had a collection of sites that were pretty disparate looking, and eventually, I had to tell the shows and regions to adopt a standard interface to help people browse.”⁸⁵

The unified Web site, known as cbc.ca, was launched in 1998, incorporating most of the corporation’s online operations under one umbrella and operating under the direction of Wolff and Hyland. “When it developed in the late nineties, we had

⁸⁴ Lewis, John – interview January 12, 2001

⁸⁵ Hyland, Mark – interview February 15, 2001

this tiny little office,” recalls Wolff. “It was like producing the morning (radio) show in Sudbury where it was more fun and there were no bosses. You saw it grow and it was all very hands-on.”⁸⁶

Unlike some media Web sites, whose front pages have presented a cross-section of the broadcaster’s content, the emphasis of the new CBC site was news. Wolff says this has been a main factor in building what he feels has been a strong reputation for the CBC site. “*Newsworld* Online showed us that news was popular so we made it (cbc.ca) a news site,” he says. “Basically, we were putting our biggest commodity with the brand.”⁸⁷

As cbc.ca expanded through the late nineties, other staff at the corporation became interested in new media to varying degrees. Although regional and national television services developed Web pages, Beatty says that staff in CBC Radio were “faster to seize on new media because they saw it as extending what they do,”⁸⁸ while many in television viewed new media with less interest. Robert Ouimet, a new media producer at CBC in Vancouver and former radio producer, is blunt with his assessment of how CBC Television staff has viewed online work in the corporation.

TV believes it has the killer medium already and the Internet is this other thing. I was in Vancouver near the TV maintenance shop, and outside the shop is a prominently displayed article with the headline “High speed streaming real time video.... Yeah television, we already have it.” CBC TV has been very conservative in its approach to the Internet because it has seen it as a bad medium on which to

⁸⁶ Wolff, Ken – interview March 7, 2002

⁸⁷ Wolff, Ken – interview March 7, 2002

⁸⁸ Beatty, Perrin – interview February 22, 2001

provide television and I don't think they've seen anything on the Net where they've said this would have a profound effect on their medium.⁸⁹

As for attitudes about new media in head office, Pierre Belanger is equally critical about the way senior managers viewed it.

Did senior management pay as much attention as we would have liked at the time? The real answer is no, if I judge from the reaction I was getting from my own VP and the tremors from the others. We were basically left on our own and told "you understand these new concepts, so just make it happen and report to us at the end of the year and make sure you don't go over budget." These are very basic guidelines and it went on like this for a couple of years.⁹⁰

From a handful of people in 1996, new media at the CBC eventually grew to the point where, today, it has about 140 employees at the CBC, and includes much more than its core news operation: there also are specialty areas for children, sports, business, consumers and the arts, along with pages for all of CBC's radio and television shows and links to 16 sites for regional CBC operations.⁹¹ In that sense, it is different from newspaper-based online operations such as CANOE or globeandmail.com, in that it delivers not just online news and publicity for the CBC's broadcast news services, but also has to serve the interests of the entire CBC. This hasn't been lost on Edward Greenspon, former Executive Editor (now Political Editor) of *The Globe and Mail* and one of the two editors that created and managed the newspaper's new Web site, which was launched in 2000.

"CBC was the only national breaking news site but it wasn't exclusively a breaking news site," he recalls of his observations of cbc.ca at the time. "It was a

⁸⁹ Ouimet, Robert – interview December 16, 2001

⁹⁰ Belanger, Pierre – interview January 14, 2002

⁹¹ Wolff, Ken – interview March 7, 2002

good site, you could link into audio and video. CBC was the only one close to the game we were looking at in Canada, but they've got a lot of water to carry."⁹²

Greenspon says one issue that has faced the online operations of CBC since their early days is that they must serve more than one role for the corporation. He notes that this was one reason why he felt that cbc.ca was not a model for *The Globe and Mail* to follow in developing its own site.⁹³

Developing the new medium would have been challenging in any time at the CBC, but the major growth of the online operation that took place in the late nineties occurred as the rest of the corporation faced cutbacks. This prompted those involved in new media to quietly take the money they were given by Perrin Beatty, but not to flaunt it.

"They were doing a traveling lay-off road show, so it was hard for people to swallow. You didn't go around and brag about being part of the Internet group," says Bob Kerr.⁹⁴ His memories fit those of Belanger, who says his initial days with the corporation were like being in charge of a booming empire when the surrounding public media landscape was being stripped.

Perrin had promised us 'you're going to go from 12 to 14 to 18 to 20 million,' so we thought man, this is place to be. At the same time though, we were also cutting back everybody else, so the reputation new media had was that something was undone. This was like the new religion and within our own machine (CBC and SRC) we were sometimes negatively perceived. I was sometimes referred to as the Pope because I had a huge budget and I was creating an empire. In two years it went from a budget of \$450 thousand to \$2.5 million.⁹⁵

⁹² Greenspon, Edward – interview March 27, 2002

⁹³ Greenspon, Edward – interview March 27, 2002

⁹⁴ Kerr, Bob – interview May 14, 2001

⁹⁵ Belanger, Pierre – interview January 14, 2002

Such increases for new media led managers of other services to challenge Beatty. One such person was CBC Radio Vice-President Alex Frame.

“There was a curious reaction,” he says. “A lot of us said ‘where the hell are you getting 20 million from us when we’re bleeding to death?’ No one thought that it was a stupid idea, but no one thought it was a smart idea.”⁹⁶

Those inside the CBC weren’t the only people to question Beatty. Transcripts from the 1999 CBC licence hearings before the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission indicate that CRTC commissioner David Colville wondered if Beatty’s plans for new media might cut into the finances of the corporation’s main services.⁹⁷ David McKendry, another CRTC commissioner at the hearing, remembers the session.

As I recall, the issue raised by the commission in the hearing was how much money they were spending on Web development and could that be better put into producing drama on the TV service. We said asked the budget was under the gun and asked why was this also a priority over local news.⁹⁸

In addition, the testimony from John Lewis during the hearings showed that, while corporation’s intent was to raise about \$2 million per year in ad revenue from

⁹⁶ Frame, Alex – interview Feb. 15, 2001

⁹⁷ Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission. *Transcripts of Proceedings for the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, CBC Licence Renewals. Volume 1.* 1999

⁹⁸ McKendry, David – interview February 23, 2001

the CBC online operations, the annual revenue generated to that point had been less than half of that amount.⁹⁹

Getting on the Internet also meant entering uncharted media territory, not just in the production of content, but also in the costs that it could involve. One example of this that emerged in the mid-nineties and continues to be a concern today is worth noting: the cost of bandwidth.

Bandwidth costs for content providers are like toll-free phone line costs for businesses – the more people who call and the more time they spend online, the more the business pays. This is different from broadcasting, where production and transmission costs are fixed and are not affected by the number of viewers or listeners. When a broadcaster goes on the Internet, the more users who access its content and the more time they spend with it, the more that company pays others who supply bandwidth. As online producers such as the CBC have discovered, the bandwidth use that proportionally costs them the most is streaming of audio, whose costs run so high because users can keep connected to them for hours at a time.

As will be explained later, producers of the CBC show *Realtime*, based in Vancouver, began to experiment in 1995 with Real Audio, the software that allows Internet users to both download audio content, and more important for the CBC, to listen to live streaming audio.¹⁰⁰ Shortly after that, at the CBC's main server in

⁹⁹ Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission. *Transcripts of Proceedings for the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, CBC Licence Renewals. Volume 1.* 1999

¹⁰⁰ Ouimet, Robert. – interview December 16, 2001.

Toronto, Joe Lawlor set up a feature to stream audio from CBC Radio live onto the Net. Demand for the feature boomed from the first day, much to Lawlor's surprise.

"One of the criticisms of live streaming is that you're taking a \$2,000 computer and making it into a \$25 radio," he says, but adds that part of the popularity of streaming, as had been the case with the initial content posted on the "debra" Web site, was driven by Internet users from outside Canada.¹⁰¹

When the CBC's streaming service started, only 20 Internet users could listen to the audio feeds at any one time, but the popularity of the service prompted the CBC to expand its streaming audio annually. This meant buying an individual lease for each stream from the software maker, a process that grew further when other audio software such as Quick Time and Windows Media Players were introduced to computer users. The result is that today, the CBC main server supplies 600 Real Audio streams, and has also added 1,000 in Quick Time and 1,300 in Windows Media Player.¹⁰² However, unlike with its fixed transmission costs for broadcasting, which are based on the fixed costs of production and transmission, the CBC must pay for the bandwidth costs of every user visiting its Web site. People such as Bob Kerr note that, because the CBC has minimized the amount of money it will raise through its Internet operations (to be explained later), the cost of content streaming is one of the greatest financial concerns facing the corporation's online services.

¹⁰¹ Lawlor, Joe – interview April 12, 2001

¹⁰² Kerr, Bob – interview May 14, 2001

They're running near capacity most of the time. This is an issue, because we cover cost of transmissions and also have to pay licence fees. We're not sure what the boundaries of this approach are – we make more streams available, incur more bandwidth costs and people expect audio and video online from us, but because of our non-commercial policy, we have no way to underwrite this in terms of revenues. It costs hundreds of thousands every year and we're just scratching the surface.¹⁰³

The price of bandwidth also worries the CBC's current President and Chief Executive Officer, Robert Rabinovitch. He says that because current bandwidth costs make online content very inefficient for the corporation to deliver, he remains cautious about the resources he is willing to invest in new media.

To me right now there is a very real role for the Internet, but it's just a technology that's hard to make money with. Point to multi-point media (such as television) is much more efficient, but the Internet, bandwidth costs are outrageous. I hope that the systems of delivery will change with time and give us more flexibility with type of programming we do and may give us flex in terms of interactivity¹⁰⁴

The CBC is not the only media provider that is concerned about the potential costs of bandwidth. Kirk Lapointe, Vice-President of CTV News, has a keen interest in the development of online media in Canada. Lapointe believes that streaming video – which the CTV site now does but which CBC has yet to add – will be a major factor to build audiences for online media, but he says that if people such as Kerr are nervous, his counterparts in the private sector are even more so.

To do interesting work (online) requires very deep pockets, the economies of streaming video frightens me and I've got a substantial news budget. It's not like broadcasting, where once you have your fixed costs, your worries are over. We have to consider what we're getting in the way of audience levels for the amount of money it's costing, especially given that the Internet has taken three steps back in recent months and where once, an awful lot of people were willing to throw a bit of

¹⁰³ Kerr, Bob – interview May 14, 2001

¹⁰⁴ Rabinovitch, Robert – interview March 13, 2002.

speculative cash on the table for advertising, that's just dried up and is going to be while coming back.¹⁰⁵

From the mid to late nineties, the expansion of audio streaming and the subsequent addition of video clip downloading to the CBC site demonstrated how the costs of bandwidth would grow with the popularity of the Web site. That, combined with the capital costs of purchasing new equipment and software licences, demonstrated to some at the CBC head office that, if the corporation was going to remain on the Internet, it was going to have to invest considerably more money in the new venture, in spite of doubts from some managers about the operation.

To put all of this in context, however, it must be acknowledged that the CBC is not the only public broadcaster to have wrestled with questions about the financing of its online operations. Compared to what has happened at the world's largest broadcaster, the British Broadcasting Corporation, the debates regarding the financing of CBC's online operations seem to have taken place in near obscurity.

Since its origins in the mid-nineties, BBC Online has mixed information and news content with usable and practical material. Along with schedules and promotional material, BBC Online added usable information: recipes, children's stories, auto reviews and BBC program transcripts and also encouraged user interactivity at an early stage. In 1994, the site invited users to join what it called a networking club and according to one Web observer, one of the most imaginative

¹⁰⁵ Lapointe, Kirk – interview January 13, 2002

things this was used for was an online Advent calendar to which club members could contribute pictures that were mounted on the calendar.¹⁰⁶

In 1997, the BBC launched a full-scale online news operation, a year after the CBC *Newsworld* site launched but a year before the CBC would have a unified online news service.¹⁰⁷ As was the case with the various Web sites at the CBC, the BBC took some time to group all of its online operations under one umbrella: its early online strategy split three ways between news, an online sales venture titled Beeb.com and BBC Online, which included program sites as well as Web pages for various activities and clubs.¹⁰⁸ According to British newspaper *The Guardian*, this created divided online politics within the corporation that “resulted in such gems as producing three unconnected World Cup sites, with meetings held between departments over which site had the right to publish a match report.”¹⁰⁹

The Guardian adds that today, the BBC has reduced internal duplication, and “can at least claim a news site to be proud of; thanks partly to a staff of over 100 journalists and a budget which most new media operations could only ever

¹⁰⁶ Crowcroft, John. *A Major Television Company's Server*.
[<http://www.cs.ucl.ac.uk/staff/jon/book/node107.html>]

¹⁰⁷ British Broadcasting Corporation. *BBC News Online wins fourth Bafta*. BBC Online October 26, 2001.
[http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/entertainment/new_media/newsid_1620000/1620383.stm]

¹⁰⁸ Nua.com. *BBC Launches National Web Campaign*.
[http://www.nua.ie/surveys/index.cgi?f=VS&art_id=905354862&rel=true]

¹⁰⁹ Waldman, Simon. *Stop the presses . . . well, not quite yet. The Internet is not about to kill newspapers, argues Simon Waldman*. *The Guardian*. January 11, 1999. [<http://www.guardian.co.uk/Archive/Article/0,4273,3806186,00.html>]

dream about.”¹¹⁰ In 2001, that budget equalled \$115 million Canadian¹¹¹ – over seven times the roughly \$14 million that the CBC now puts into new media operations.¹¹² By comparison, the BBC’s entire budget for 2000-2001 equalled about \$6.8 billion, about five times that of the CBC.¹¹³ Put in other terms, the budget for BBC Online equals about 1.7 per cent of the corporation’s total budget, compared to the CBC where roughly one per cent of the budget goes to new media.¹¹⁴

However, news of the British broadcaster’s allowance for online services has come at the cost of negative coverage in the British media. Labour MP Gerald Kaufman, chairman of the culture select committee, has suggested that BBC Online should either be scrapped or be transformed into an entirely advertising-funded service.¹¹⁵ The chair of the private sector-based British Internet Publishers Alliance, Rob Hersov, has charged that, “the BBC is a power unto itself that can get away

¹¹⁰ Farrelly, Paul. *Does Auntie mean business? Iconoclastic newspaperman Jeff Randall is set to upend the BBC’s cosy world.* The Guardian. November 12, 2000. [<http://www.guardian.co.uk/Archive/Article/0,4273,4089845,00.html>]

¹¹¹ British Broadcasting Corporation. *Annual Report. 2000-2001. Consolidated Statement of Income and Expenditure.* p. 7 [http://www.bbc.co.uk/info/report2001/report/pdf/annual_report_62_79.pdf]

¹¹² Rabinovitch, Robert – interview March 13, 2002.

¹¹³ British Broadcasting Corporation. Op. Cit. p. 1. [http://www.bbc.co.uk/info/report2001/report/pdf/annual_report_62_79.pdf]

¹¹⁴ Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. *Annual Report 2000-2001, Financial Overview.* p. 6 [http://cbc.radio-canada.ca/htmen/pdf_rtf/CBC_Financials_2001.pdf]

¹¹⁵ Vickers, Amy. *Scrap BBC Online says Labour MP.* The Guardian. January 31, 2001. [<http://media.guardian.co.uk/broadcast/story/0,7493,431578,00.html>]

with murder. There's not a single thing that the BBC has done in new media that has not already been done by the commercial sector."¹¹⁶

Despite the controversy, the BBC has dedicated a larger portion of its budget to new media than does the CBC. It also has worked to develop good public relations and participation in the operation. In 1999, it launched *Webwise*, an intensive six-week campaign to promote the Internet to the British public and play up to the Labour government's information age strategy. The campaign involved 5,000 community organizations and six weeks of extensive television and radio programming on the subject of the Internet.¹¹⁷

Such campaigns allow for the BBC to boast of its involvement in the community, but the scope of its operations continues to expand beyond what the corporation can afford with its current funding structures. Last summer, Ashley Highfield, BBC's director of new media, said the cost of plans to put all BBC programming online could force the corporation to charge for new media services over and above the licence fee that British citizens pay to the broadcaster. Noting that half of BBC Online's estimated ten million users accessed the site from overseas without paying license fees, Highfield suggested a system of giving those in the UK limited credits to access BBC Online services for a limited time.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Nua.com. *BBC Launches National Web Campaign*.
[http://www.nua.ie/surveys/index.cgi?f=VS&art_id=905354862&rel=true]

¹¹⁸ Vickers, Amy. *BBC admits plans for advertising-funded Web site*. The Guardian. January 30, 2001.
[<http://media.guardian.co.uk/newmedia/story/0,7496,431026,00.html>]

The idea made headlines – some negative – in British newspapers for a short period of time before it was dismissed in a brief BBC statement: “We encourage an atmosphere of voicing ideas and Ashley was just talking hypothetically.”¹¹⁹ Journalist Amy Vickers of *The Guardian* commented on the episode.

With its charter up for renewal in 2006, the BBC is fearful that sliding TV ratings may mean a reduction in the amount of license fee revenue given to it, so it is having to come up with radical new ideas to catch dwindling audiences and raise more cash. But maybe this is one idea that goes a little bit too far – may it never see the cold light of day.¹²⁰

Managers at the CBC have yet to have such a public airing about the finances of the corporation’s online operations. This may be because, in Britain, the BBC is such a major institution that journalists in the country give more coverage to its operations. It may also be that any turmoil surrounding the CBC in recent years has concentrated more on reductions than it has on expansion at the corporation. Having faced some very public discussion about his abilities in leading the CBC, Beatty is unrepentant for his aggressive stance in favour of expanding the corporation’s online operations. He notes that public questions he faced from groups such as the CRTC paled by comparison to the questions about new media that he encountered from staff inside the corporation. He attributes this partly to a pragmatism that has become part of the internal culture in the CBC.

¹¹⁹ Vickers, Amy. *The BBC Online beast slips its leash*. The Guardian, July 9, 2001 [<http://www.guardian.co.uk/internetnews/story/0,7369,518677,00.html>]

¹²⁰ Vickers, Amy. *BBC admits plans for advertising-funded Web site*. The Guardian, January 30, 2001. [<http://media.guardian.co.uk/newmedia/story/0,7496,431026,00.html>]

In the corporation, there is a unit loyalty that I work for my program and if the guy down the hall gets closed down and his budget comes my way it's unfortunate for him but I'm glad to see the money. My argument over why it (being on the Internet) was important was that the strongest product of Canadian content was the CBC and that it was most able to establish that Canadian presence on the Internet. I saw it as way of adding value to our conventional services.¹²¹

Managers of these conventional services might have disagreed with Beatty, arguing that reduced government funding for the CBC made it the wrong time to expand into new media, but the lack of interest the officials showed in online communications was overcome by the determination of the CBC president to get the corporation on the Internet.

¹²¹ Beatty, Perrin – interview February 22, 2001

PART 5 – A TALE OF TWO PRESIDENTS: HOW PERRIN BEATTY AND ROBERT RABINOVITCH HAVE AFFECTED NEW MEDIA AT THE CBC

“This was a Perrin Beatty dream,” says Pierre Belanger.¹²²

According to Belanger and others, the former CBC president and CEO was the most influential manager behind the development of online communications at the corporation.

“Perrin was a big booster of new media,” adds communications analyst David Ellis. “The CBC would be way behind where it is now if it hadn’t been for him.”¹²³

While it is simplistic to attach the entire state of new media at the CBC to the actions of just one or two people, it is worth examining the effect of the contrasting attitudes and approaches to online communication taken by Beatty, the former President and CEO, and Robert Rabinovitch, who currently holds the positions. Partly because of different times at the CBC, partly because of different circumstances surrounding the Internet itself and partly because of the differing attitudes of the two men, new media at the CBC has experienced different eras under these two presidents.

When he came to the CBC in 1995, Beatty had held several federal cabinet posts, including Minister of Communications, in the Progressive Conservative governments of both Joe Clark and Brian Mulroney. A self-admitted technophile, he chuckles today at the stories that circulated at CBC’s head office about his

¹²² Belanger, Pierre – interview January 14, 2002

¹²³ Ellis, David. – interview May 11, 2001

enthusiasm for computers and Web page design and confesses that he is seldom more than an arm's length away from his laptop computer and his *Blackberry* personal digital assistant.¹²⁴

Beatty's background in government as Minister of Communications convinced him that developing online activities at the CBC could help the corporation play a greater part in the policy debate about how the Internet would be developed in Canada. When he took over the CBC presidency, Beatty felt that the corporation had no choice as a public communicator but to develop a way to put its content on the Internet. He believed that such a role was important to both the corporation and the country – in other words, that the CBC needed to be a role model that could aid or influence the development of government policy concerning new media.¹²⁵ This view was reflected in a 1998 CBC submission to the CRTC that requested a licence for an integrated broadcast and new media service that was to be called Radio 3.

"A strong CBC New Media presence, which creates, purchases, promotes and disseminates new media content, may well be one of the best public policy tools to ensure a strong Canadian presence on the Internet," the CBC stated in its comments to the commission, echoing the views of the scientists who designed and built the infrastructure of the Internet in Canada.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ Beatty, Perrin – interview February 22, 2001

¹²⁵ Beatty, Perrin – interview February 22, 2001

¹²⁶ Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission. *Transcripts of Proceedings for the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, CBC Licence Renewals. Volume 1.* 1999.

The CBC's pitch to be the flag-bearer of Canadian content on the Web came at time when the corporation was attempting to redefine itself and its future relevance in Canadian broadcasting. Whatever the cost of new media, Beatty felt that it was a key element in developing a new nationalistic CBC identity.

"My feeling still is that we do not have the luxury to sit on old technologies and not adopt new ones. The risk I saw was that we could become a corner on AOL," he says, referring to the American media giant. "We wouldn't accept for one second that Dan Rather would put aside five minutes to do Canadian news, nor could we accept that the Canadian portion of the World Wide Web should be housed as a department in a foreign operation."¹²⁷

Other senior managers appear to have taken longer to come to this view, probably because new media arrived at the CBC at a time when the corporation was looking for new means to generate revenue, not spend it, but the staff that helped to develop CBC's new media say that had Beatty not been in their corner, the corporation would have gone online later and with less commitment. While he believes that Beatty's vision to use online services to support conventional media was too conservative, new media producer Robert Ouimet does feel that the former president's commitment to develop new media in the mid- nineties has been legitimized by the actions of CBC audiences in the half-decade that followed.

I don't think CBC should be on the Internet just to be on Internet, but you can make a pretty good argument, when you look at the number of Canadians online. Radio statistics show that, in the 70s, CBC Radio had between 12 and 14 per cent of people between 25 and 49 listening to it and today has about one per cent. You don't have to be a brain surgeon to see that if you don't go to where they are using the medium, if some people are watching less TV, which they are, and are

¹²⁷ Beatty, Perrin – interview February 22, 2001

listening to less radio, which they are, and are using the Internet for their primary entertainment device and you're not there, you're kind of in trouble, aren't you?¹²⁸

A former Deputy Minister of Communications (not under Beatty), Robert Rabinovitch arrived at CBC in 1995 after serving as Executive Vice-president and Chief Operating Officer of Claridge Inc., a private corporation he joined in 1987. Described by journalist Matthew Fraser as a former "Liberal political aide and brilliant policy wonk in the high-flying Trudeau years,"¹²⁹ Rabinovitch appears less interested using the CBC as a tool to influence communications policy, perhaps because, through his strong ties to the Prime Minister's office, he can aim to influence politics as much as policy.¹³⁰

As has been mentioned previously, Beatty was an unabashed champion in pushing for the expansion of online media at the CBC, something respected by Rabinovitch.

What if Beatty hadn't done it? We would have been behind the eight ball. He had to say he was setting it out as priority that was corporate. Had he not done that, he would have had lot of nods (from CBC managers) and slow delivery. Had I been Perrin? Perrin was a fan of it and I'm not a fan. I don't know that I would have had the foresight, so I give him the credit. It was the right thing for the time.¹³¹

Rabinovitch has not, however, supported the expansion of new media during his tenure. Upon arriving at the corporation, he shelved Beatty's plans for annual budget increases for new media. According to Ken Wolff, Rabinovitch

¹²⁸ Ouimet, Robert – interview December 16, 2001

¹²⁹ Fraser, Matthew. *Free-for-All: The Struggle for Dominance on the Digital Frontier*. 1999 p. 46

¹³⁰ Ibid. p. 46

¹³¹ Rabinovitch, Robert – interview March 13, 2002

essentially froze funding of new media, allowing for minimal increases, but nothing near what had been proposed by Beatty.¹³² By his own account, Rabinovitch says the new media budget is just over \$14 million, and he does not foresee any major increase to it in the near future.¹³³

According to the CBC's staff intranet site, the corporation lists five principles it aims to follow with its new media operations: to adhere to the objectives, mission and ideals of the Canadian public broadcasting mandate while reinforcing the CBC brand, image and reputation; to offer socially and culturally pertinent content independent from commercial imperatives; to reflect and interconnect the many faces of Canada; to foster an innovative, risk-taking and R&D culture generating standard-setting content and to promote the CBC's dynamic approach to the use of new technologies.¹³⁴

Such goals are broad enough that half a decade ago, they might have been listed by Beatty as reason to expand new media, while today, the same principles might be cited by Rabinovitch as the limits beyond which new media need not venture. Ultimately, however, the best way to read new media's fortunes at the CBC is to observe the resources that the corporation is willing to invest in it.

Rabinovitch and Beatty both say they view the Internet as a means by which the CBC might expand its services, but while Beatty saw the Internet as having its

¹³² Wolff, Ken – interview February 16, 2001

¹³³ Rabinovitch, Robert – interview March 13, 2002

¹³⁴ Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. New Media. *Guiding Principles 2001-2002*. [http://intranet.cbc-radio-canada/media_en/objectifs/principles.htm]

own unique traits apart from television and radio, requiring different content,

Rabinovitch is more sceptical.

I see most new media experiments to date as different delivery systems. It's a way to give people more background and to give them *les événements* right away, but it's not a medium *per se*. I see it as an add-on to what we're doing. I see most new media experiments to date as different delivery systems.¹³⁵

Rabinovitch notes that this more cautious view he has of the Internet has caused him to take a different approach than his predecessor. .

I think one of big differences between Perrin's approach and mine is that I wouldn't allow for a fifth new media silo. When I came here, new media was its own operation and he had taxed all the other media lines in order to pay for it. I said no, new media is a delivery system, and as a system of delivery, its content had to come from the producers of radio and television and therefore should be interrelated with the existing systems. It's a very different approach and I think we were both right.¹³⁶

Rabinovitch's vision of the CBC is that, in the future, different media will be used to deliver versions of the same content produced in radio and television. In the CBC and other media corporations, this approach is sometimes known as content management, and the importance of it to Rabinovitch is demonstrated by his assignment of CBC's Vice President for English Television, Harold Redekopp, – the senior manager with the largest budget in the corporation – to develop a content management system at the corporation.¹³⁷

The bottom line then, according to Rabinovitch, is that while he is in charge of the CBC, online content produced by the corporation will be driven largely by its

¹³⁵ Rabinovitch, Robert – interview March 13, 2002

¹³⁶ Rabinovitch, Robert – interview March 13, 2002

¹³⁷ Lewis, John – interview January 12, 2001

radio and television operations.¹³⁸ The exception is Radio 3, which he says will get roughly \$3 million per year to develop new applications for online content. It's worth noting that Rabinovitch refers to Radio 3 a "skunk works" – the same term that Andrew Patrick uses to describe the work that he and his colleagues did to put CBC on the Internet – work that is largely unrecognized inside and outside of the CBC.

While Rabinovitch's view of the new media may give little solace to online programmers who have hoped the corporation would see their medium as unique and worthy of more attention and resources, it fits with what seems to have been his overall goal at the CBC so far. As *National Post* columnist Matthew Fraser explains, Rabinovitch's aim is to stabilize a crown corporation that has been through both financial and emotional upheaval in the past decade.

He understood that the CBC, unlike the BBC, didn't have the luxury of setting out on ambitious expansion plans. By the end of the 1990s, it was no longer a major presence in the cluttered Canadian broadcast landscape. In fact, it was struggling to survive with severely reduced funding. As noted, he therefore jettisoned Beatty's "constellation" vision and announced that the CBC henceforth would concentrate on "core competencies" in selected program areas.¹³⁹

What it does not demonstrate, however, is a vision of the potential that CBC's work online might have as unique in Canada or how it could serve people in ways different from radio and television.

¹³⁸ Rabinovitch, Robert – interview March 13, 2002

¹³⁹ Fraser, Matthew. *The CBC's choice: Constellations or core competencies*. Policy Options. September 2000.
[<http://www.irpp.org/po/archive/po0900.htm#fraser>]

By comparison, Beatty demonstrated a greater confidence in the potential of online media as a unique means of communication. After leaving the CBC, he outlined his views in a speech he gave at an Alberta conference on high technology.

Today's young people no longer rely upon newspapers or television alone for their entertainment and information. Their means of gathering information and knowledge is increasingly the Internet. They live in chat rooms, purchase products and make friends on the Internet. Their music and reading material is obtained from the Internet. It is their first point of reference. They are driven to innovate and have a mindset of immediacy requiring fast results. Successful companies today have learned to use the Internet in much the same way.¹⁴⁰

It would be too simplistic to say that the overall path of CBC New Media – expansion in the mid-nineties, followed by the limits on its growth in recent years – has been due solely to the differing views of the two CBC presidents, but these views have been influential. As previously noted, Beatty proposed funding that would have increased new media budgets annually and had the CBC met his goal of dedicating two per cent of revenues to the service, new media's budget now would be about \$28 million, roughly twice the amount that Rabinovitch says is now allocated to the service.¹⁴¹ In addition, Beatty took money from other media to help pay for a developing new media operation in the mid-nineties while Rabinovitch has given responsibility for that operation back to managers in television and radio.

One person who has noticed this shift is Adam Froman, president of Delvinia, a Toronto media marketing firm that has provided research and advice to CBC management when Beatty was president. Froman argues that Rabinovitch

¹⁴⁰ Beatty, Perrin. *Change at the Speed of Light: Can Government Keep Up?* speech to the Smart2000 Conference. Calgary. October 23, 2000. [http://www.cme-mec.ca/national/documents/Governments_Keep_up.pdf]

¹⁴¹ Rabinovitch, Robert – interview March 13, 2002

may be missing how “the interactive experience will give the CBC a real reason to exist, as opposed to a politically motivated one.”

The perception of the CBC is that they produce programs because that is what they want to do, but I find some people there from more traditional backgrounds don't see the forest for the trees and I fear that Rabinovitch won't see how the Internet could give the CBC a reason to exist, that it can help ask what Canadians want from the CBC. The CBC is ignoring the potential of the Internet for audience research, to find out what the audience wants. It doesn't see how you use the interactive part to inform your non-interactive activities.¹⁴²

Although Froman's concern about the current direction CBC New Media comes mostly from a marketing perspective, he feels that it is applicable to the corporation in a broader sense. As will be explained later, his views about the limited vision that CBC management is displaying fit with those of other people who work both inside and outside of the corporation.

¹⁴² Froman, Adam – interview February 16, 2001

PART 6 – THE ARITHMETIC OF PATRIOTISM: THE ROLE OF THE CBC AS A CANADIAN PUBLIC COMMUNICATOR IN VARIOUS MEDIA

Sarah Morris, the chat room moderator for cbc.ca, has just hung up the phone from a conversation with a colleague at CBC. A chat room she had hoped to hold a few nights from this one now has been cancelled.

“The National town hall was supposed to go but the people at *The National* cancelled,” she explains. “It’s kind of last minute thing and they couldn’t get all the panellists lined up for the chat.”¹⁴³

The chat room was to coincide with a CBC news special being aired on the history of Canada, the kind of topic that could have highlighted the CBC’s role as one of the country’s chief providers of information about its heritage – a role that is part of the corporation’s mandate.¹⁴⁴ Linking the development of online communications with that mandate and the role of nationalism at the CBC provides a way to view how new media compares to other CBC media in the role of supporting a Canadian identity.

Created by the Broadcasting Act of 1932, the Canadian Radio Broadcasting Corporation – later the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation – was formed as a result of recommendations of the Aird Commission, where various witnesses argued for the creation of a Canadian public broadcaster.

“We want a Canadian system of programs of national importance nationally distributed ...of a character and quality suited to national dignity suited to our

¹⁴³ Morris, Sarah – interview February 15, 2001

¹⁴⁴ Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. *Mandate*.
[http://cbc.radio-canada.ca/htmen/1_2.htm]

growing national importance,” stated Dr. S. G. Ritchie of the Halifax County Radio Association at the Halifax hearing of the Aird Commission on June 17, 1929.¹⁴⁵

For over seven decades, however, a key reason for the CBC’s existence has been to provide more than “national dignity,” it has been to counteract the presence of powerful mass culture forces from the United States. Graham Spry, sometimes called the father of public broadcasting in Canada, argued this point with passion.¹⁴⁶ In 1932, he outlined his views before a special House of Commons committee on public broadcasting.

The American chains have regarded Canada as part of their field and consider Canada is in a state of radio tutelage. The question before the committee is whether Canada is to establish a chain that is owned and operated and controlled by organizations associated or controlled by American interests. The question is the State or the United States.¹⁴⁷

Three decades later, a similar wave of patriotism prompted the debut of Canadian television, but as was the case with radio, it was influenced by a streak of pragmatism. When the CBC brought television to Canada in 1952, the medium was over two decades old in Europe and had been on the air in the United States for six years. Many Canadians who lived close to the U.S. border already had purchased TV sets to take in signals from American stations, so managers at the CBC and ministers of the federal cabinet were keen to see the public broadcaster get involved in the new medium as quickly as possible. This support for getting the CBC on the

¹⁴⁵ Bird, Roger. *Documents of Canadian Broadcasting*.

¹⁴⁶ Nash, Knowlton. *The Microphone Wars: a history of triumph and betrayal at the CBC*. 1994. p. 458

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 85

television airwaves was echoed by the 1951 report of the Massey Commission, which overruled the protests of potential private TV broadcasters and supported the “cautious introduction of television under the firm control of the CBC.”¹⁴⁸

While they were keen to see the development of Canadian television content, government officials had another reason to support the new medium. They felt the growth of Canadian television would help to stimulate the growth of a Canadian electronics industry, something that had started during World War Two, but which, with the end of the war, lacked a demand for its products and for the skills of thousands of veterans in need of work.¹⁴⁹

Throughout much of its history, the flag-bearing duty of the CBC has been a cornerstone of the support the CBC has received from government, partly because the corporation’s duties were written into The Broadcasting Act. The act has been through several revisions, the most recent in 1991, but still charges the corporation with a sweeping mandate: to produce a range of programming reflecting all of Canada and its regions to national and regional audiences, to meet these needs in two official languages, and to contribute to a shared national identity.¹⁵⁰

Some may argue that the requirement to promote a national identity has been watered down in recent decades, but it is regularly noted at licence hearings before the CRTC, which said in 1987 that it saw the CBC as an “instrument of

¹⁴⁸ Bird, Roger. *Documents of Canadian Broadcasting*. p. 210

¹⁴⁹ Weir, E. Austin. *The Struggle for National Broadcasting in Canada*. p. 256

¹⁵⁰ Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. *Mandate*.
[http://cbc.radio-canada.ca/htmen/1_2.htm]

public policy to shoulder a special responsibility for the cultural, political, social and economic fabric of Canada.”¹⁵¹

For much of the CBC’s history, this kind of nationalistic mandate affected the corporation in two ways. First, it focussed the CBC on a goal of reaching as many Canadians as possible, despite their language and location. Second, through federal legislation and the actions of the CRTC, it allowed governments to use broadcasting as a tool of nation building by monitoring the “Canadian-ness” media content. The result was that the government view of the value of Canadian programming often was based on how well that programming contributed to some sort of Canadian identity. This reinforced the role of the CBC to produce and distribute Canadian content to the country as a way to help limit the influence of similar services from the United States – what Davidson Dunton, chair of the corporation from 1945 to 1958, explained as replacing “the ordinary commercial arithmetic” with the “arithmetic of patriotism.”¹⁵²

Carleton University professor Paul Attallah argues that this is no longer the case and that, since the arrival of television, successive governments have cared less and less about the CBC’s role as a tool of nationalism.

We have moved from a situation – which held sway from the 1930s to 1952 – in which governments looked favourably upon broadcasting as a means to foster community and to communicate effectively with a large number of people, to a situation – increasingly pronounced since the arrival of television – in which

¹⁵¹ Canadian Radio–Television and Telecommunications Commission. *Renewal of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation licences*. 1987.

¹⁵² Taras, David. *Power and Betrayal in the Canadian Media*. p.120

governments distrust broadcasting and seek to neutralize it because they can no longer control its outcomes.¹⁵³

In spite of this evolution in its programming, the maple leaf remains an effective part of the CBC's brand identity and officially, the corporation still espouses a patriotic role for all of its operations, including new media. This was outlined on the CBC's Web site two years ago.

Although the Internet is still in its infancy, no one who has watched its spectacular growth can doubt the important role it will play in the lives of each of us in the coming years. To properly fulfill its mandate, the CBC must be present in this new medium. At this stage, the prudent course is to build a strong Internet beachhead in both official languages. CBC's Internet sites are already among the most popular Canadian sites, offering news, public affairs and programming information. While the CBC's first priority was to reformat and promote our conventional programming, capitalizing on the strength of the CBC brand, we are now offering content unique to the Web. We have set a goal to have our site become the premier information source about Canada on the Internet.¹⁵⁴

This statement reflects how Perrin Beatty used the familiar refrains of nationalism to argue the need for the CBC to develop its new media services. It was a tactic not lost on people such as CRTC commissioner David McKendry, who says that the CBC's stress on the Canadian-ness of its online content seemed a strategic move aimed at heading off "cultural nationalists who are worried that our Canadian identity is being lost on the Internet."¹⁵⁵ McKendry's observation comes from having been one of the commissioners on the CRTC's 1999 investigation into new

¹⁵³ Attallah, Paul. *Public Broadcasting in Canada: Legitimation Crisis and Loss of Audience*. Gazette, Volume 62. 2000. p. 199

¹⁵⁴ Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. *Summary of the Corporate Plan for the period 1999/00 to 2003/04. section 10*.
[http://cbc.radio-canada.ca/htmen/pdf_rtf/corp.plan_en.pdf]

¹⁵⁵ McKendry, David – interview February 23, 2001

media, whose final report outlines the concerns the investigation heard about Canadian content.

A few parties argued that a regulatory approach is the only way to ensure that Canadian new media content is produced, promoted and guaranteed a place of prominence on the Internet. The main suggestions for regulatory measures included: (1) requiring ISPs to contribute a portion of their annual revenues to content development funding; (2) requiring ISPs and/or content aggregators to ensure shelf space and a place of prominence for Canadian new media content; and (3) requiring Canadian ISPs to provide links to Canadian Web sites.¹⁵⁶

The principles of Canadian content have not been designed just to provide an alternative to American media, but to help build a cultural infrastructure in this country that goes beyond just exposing the work of Canada's artists or journalists and develops recording studios, Canadian news rooms and film production companies in this country. The CBC often has been seen as a place that drove the development of both talent and infrastructure that could build both the corporation itself and the rest of the country's culture and media sector. Looking at the CRTC's 1999 report on new media, the same cannot be said for the development of the Internet in Canada. As the reports states and as David McKendry confirms, the CRTC didn't view development of online content from the CBC as crucial to a medium that it felt already was generating plenty of Canadian online content in the private sector.

In the Commission's view, the circumstances that led to the need for regulation of Canadian content in traditional broadcasting do not currently exist in the Internet environment. Market forces are providing a Canadian presence on the Internet that is also supported by a strong demand for Canadian new media content.

¹⁵⁶ Canadian Radio–Television and Telecommunications Commission: *Report on New Media*. section 67. 1999

Participants provided statistics indicating that Canadian Web sites represent about five per cent of all Internet Web sites.¹⁵⁷

While it is true that the CBC helped to pioneer some content for the Internet and succeeded in developing its Web site ahead of other Canadian broadcasters, it appears that government policy makers had little view that the corporation could play a nationalistic role in new media that might compare to the early years of Canadian radio and television. As it lacked this role or any nationalistic push from government bodies, the corporation had less reason to view online media as a fundamental way to fulfill its mandate.

Outside the CBC, support for its new media services also has been non-committal from public bodies such as the CRTC, another indication that there was little government strategy aimed at using the CBC as a way to develop a new media infrastructure or industry in the way manner that government had used CBC Television in the early 1950s to stimulate the Canadian electronics industry. While Andrew Patrick does note that traffic to the original “debra” site of CBC content did generate a significant portion of the online traffic in Canada at that time, he also notes that his “skunk works”- style creation of the site was largely a science experiment, not a high-profile media venture that grew from a policy body in the way that CBC Radio grew from the Aird Commission or that CBC Television emerged after the Massey report.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ Canadian Radio–Television and Telecommunications Commission. *Report on New Media*. section 68. 1999

¹⁵⁸ Patrick, Andrew – interview April 30, 2001

Although Perrin Beatty wanted to see the CBC play a primary role in influencing government policy concerning the Internet, this too has not been the case. While it is true that the Information Highway Advisory Committee report of 1999 mentioned the corporation as a possible developer of Canadian content for the Internet,¹⁵⁹ IHAC did not note any other role for the corporation, an interesting omission when one considers the technical experience the CBC had in building a national infrastructure of TV and radio transmitters.

When IHAC's successor, The National Broadband Task Force, issued its final report in 2001, it made no mention of the CBC. Unlike IHAC, which at least had one CBC representative on one of its sub-committees, the Broadband Task Force lacked any input from the corporation. This still annoys Perrin Beatty, who argues that the CBC could have played a valuable role in bridging the interests of public and private sector members of the task force.¹⁶⁰ However, it does not concern Industry Canada's Michael Binder, who says that CBC representatives were not needed on the Broadband Task Force because "it already had enough government people on it – the mandate was about infrastructure, not content."¹⁶¹ What Binder fails to note, however, is that content providers were represented on the task force, but by people from the private sector: the Canadian Cable Television

¹⁵⁹ Information Highway Advisory Council. *Preparing Canada for a Digital World: Final Report of the Information Highway Advisory Council*. section 5.8. 1997

¹⁶⁰ Beatty, Perrin – interview February 22, 2001

¹⁶¹ Binder, Michael – interview April 19, 2001

Association, the Canadian Association of Broadcasters and Alliance Atlantis Communications.¹⁶²

It is, however, possible that further questions about government policy concerning online content will be answered more completely this year, following hearings by the federal parliament's Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage. It is holding hearings to consider revisions to the 1991 Broadcasting Act in order to include the impact of new media technologies.¹⁶³

What we see already on the Internet is that, just as its television service has faced competition for ratings from American television broadcasters, CBC's online operation faces competition from a variety of Web content sources, the majority of which are based in the United States. The CBC's own research shows that as of December 2001, cbc.ca ranked 38th in the Nielsen NetRatings surveys of Canadian Internet use, with 28 of the sites that outranked it being based in the United States.¹⁶⁴ For Canadians on the Net, American sites dominate their consumption

¹⁶² National Broadband Task Force. *Report of the National Broadband Task Force*. Industry Canada. 2001.
[http://broadband.gc.ca/Broadband-document/english/table_content.htm]

¹⁶³ House of Commons Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage. *Heritage Committee to Conduct Study on the State of the Canadian Broadcasting System*. May 10, 2001.
[<http://www.parl.gc.ca/InfoComDoc/37/1/HERI/PressReleases/PressRel-e.htm>]

¹⁶⁴ Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. *Ranking of the Most Visited Web Domains in the Month of December 2001 by Anglo Canadians 2+ Using the Internet at Home*. CBC Research. December 2001.
[http://intranet.cbc-radio-canada/research_en/newmedia/netratings/index.htm]

patterns in a way comparable to the way American television programs dominate their televisions and with the CRTC proving, so far, to be reluctant to impose restrictions for Canadian content on Internet service providers in this country, there seems little indication that this will change.

One dramatic example of this came in the fall of 2001, following the destruction of the World Trade Centre towers in New York. The research firm Pollara released a poll in which 2,000 Canadians interviewed following September 11 indicated a clear preference to turn to non-Canadian sources for online information about the tragedy. When asked, "what Web sites do you visit most often to search for international news?" 32 per cent named CNN, 11 per cent named Yahoo, ten per cent mentioned MSN/MSNBC and nine per cent of respondents cited the CBC, placing the public broadcaster in fourth place. With eight per cent each, CANOE tied for fifth with *The Globe and Mail*.¹⁶⁵

"The results were startling in some respects. Although we anticipated a large number, the extent to which the Internet was used to inform online Canadians about the WTC events was much larger than expected," wrote Duncan McKie, president of Pollara. "This shows that the Internet can overwhelm the local news distribution channels under these exceptional circumstances. It is interesting that

¹⁶⁵ Ellis, David and McKie, Duncan. *Canadian Online News Consumers Click CNN.com: New Media Perspectives survey also shows the Internet can overwhelm traditional news distribution channels under exceptional circumstances*. Pollara Inc. 2002.

[http://www.pollara.ca/new/Library/surveys/cnn_online.htm]

online Canadians in such large numbers turned to CNN.com and other non-Canadian sources during this period.”¹⁶⁶

“On television, Canadians flock to domestic news and ignore U.S. sources. On the Web, however, it's not nationality that counts – it's brand, an understanding of online content and a strong cross-media presence,” said David Ellis, who was co-author of the study.¹⁶⁷

The poll further demonstrated that, when it comes to online media, CBC has found itself in a new game to claim an identity. Even more than has been the case on television it is difficult to appeal to patriotism when media routinely cross domestic borders. This was even more the case for young people in the survey, the very age group that the CBC hopes to attract via new media: compared to the 32 per cent figure for all of those surveyed, 39 per cent those between 25 and 34 years of age turned first to CNN, as did 44 per cent of those 18 to 24 years old.¹⁶⁸

It's the kind of information that makes Robert Ouimet suggest the need at the CBC for discussion about a fundamental question concerning new media.

“The corporation has a lot of stuff to figure out in terms of what it means for a public broadcaster to be a global broadcaster, and just who is it you're serving,” says Ouimet. “Are you serving a global audience or a Canadian audience, and what resources should you spend on that global audience?”¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ouimet, Robert – interview December 16, 2001

If grasping the way the Internet works has been one challenge for the CBC, grasping a new definition of its role on this new global medium has been and could continue to be could be an even greater challenge. That is why comparing this newest medium with other media that developed earlier helps to provide some context for the challenges the corporation faces today.

While the CBC used to be a large fish in a small Canadian media pond, it is now just one source in a much larger pond. In the new environment of online media, the CBC's hope that Canadians would embrace a Canadian product first hasn't always been the result and Davidson Dunton's "arithmetic of patriotism" has experienced a harder time adding up than it did in the past.

PART 7 – FRONT PAGE OR BRANDING TOOL: BALANCING INFORMATION WITH PROMOTION AT CBC.CA

As illustrated earlier, roughly three-quarters of the CBC's annual revenue comes from government allowances. The balance between this public funding and the search for ways to generate new revenue has played an influential and changing role in the development of new media – a role that is worth noting for the way it attempted to counter the lack of support that new media initially encountered in the CBC.

In spite of its public financial support, the search for private revenue has played an ongoing role in the CBC's history. In 1929, the Aird Commission, the main force behind the creation of CBC Radio, wrestled with the issue, and while many of its commissioners were said to prefer no advertising at all on the CBC, their report recommended that Ottawa allow indirect advertising, "which properly handled, has no very objectionable features, at the same time resulting in the collection of much revenue."¹⁷⁰ CBC Radio carried advertising until 1971, when it overhauled much of its schedule to create the current emphasis on news and current affairs on Radio One and arts and music on Radio Two.¹⁷¹ CBC Television has carried advertising for its entire half-century of existence, but the commercial revenue earned by TV has been a subject of constant debate. Author and former

¹⁷⁰ Gasher, Mike. *Invoking Public Support for Public Broadcasting: The Aird Commission Revisited* Canadian Journal of Communication. p. 10, Volume 23, Number 2, 1998

¹⁷¹ Nash, Knowlton. Op. Cit. p. 398

CBC broadcaster Knowlton Nash says that the CBC's licence renewal of 1974 was an example of this debate, when Pierre Juneau, then the chair of the CRTC, told Laurent Picard, the president of the CBC, that the corporation needed to eliminate all advertising from its programming.

Although apparently locked in verbal combat, Picard and Juneau were talking past each other. Picard was obsessed with meeting present challenges, while Juneau was looking to the future. Ideologically, the two were, in truth, not far apart, but their timing and styles were profoundly different. Picard, the pragmatist, felt the CBC could not cope with a loss of about one-third of its total budget which, he said, the commercial reduction would mean, while Juneau, the idealist, felt commercial reduction was necessary to save the CBC's soul.¹⁷²

Over two decades later, the CBC has wrestled with the idea of earning revenue from the Internet. With the information highway in the nineties came the view at the CBC that this new medium might be worth the investment if it could provide a commercial return. Middle managers, such as Diane Williamson, saw the Internet as a vehicle for the CBC to sell transcripts, tapes and other corporate merchandise.¹⁷³ At the corporation's head office, the person assigned to push this notion even farther was John Lewis, a senior CBC business manager who, in 1996, was appointed managing director of new media for the corporation. Today, having recently returned to business development, Lewis is frank about the motives behind his work in developing the CBC's online operations.

"The direction I'd been given was to earn as much money as you can and then one day if you can become self-sufficient, then great," he says. "They said

¹⁷² Ibid. p. 416

¹⁷³ Williamson, Diane – interview March 15, 2001

we're giving this to you because there's no money for it and you've done all these other things with no money, so you go for it."¹⁷⁴

Given North American society's hunger for turning to new types of media as ways to make money, it is hardly surprising that, in the early years of its development, CBC's online content was aimed as much at generating revenue as it was at serving the country. Managers' view of online media was likely influenced by the market potential of the Internet, as recalled by author Jim Carroll in the fall of 2000.

Remember when, back in 1994, the hype machine first began to crank? At that time, many companies looked longingly toward a world in which people would be able to shop from the comfort of their sofas, pointing and clicking their way through an interactive TV screen. Executives planned grand strategies by which they could expand their market reach to a world of couch potato androids eagerly clicking away in an online shopping nirvana.¹⁷⁵

In his office at Atlantis Alliance Communications, Norm Bolen says that things have changed in recent years and most private content providers in Canada have yet to turn major profits from their online operations. Still, he has few doubts about the wisdom of the CBC's move into the online world.

If I were running the CBC, I'd be putting money into the Internet. Their job is to provide service to the public and that means using every pipeline there is. It's hard to say how much money there is to be made, but as broadband increases, I think in the long-term, there will be more ways to make money on the Internet.¹⁷⁶

Bolen was the first CBC manager who spoke with Andrew Stephens and the other government staff who proposed putting CBC content on the Internet in 1993,

¹⁷⁴ Lewis, John – interview January 12, 2001

¹⁷⁵ Carroll, Jim. *The E-volutionaries*. CA Magazine, Sept. 2000.

¹⁷⁶ Bolen, Norm – interview April 12, 2001

a time when he was more concerned with journalism than marketing. Today, in charge of The History Channel, Bolen is fascinated by the programming possibilities of the Internet, but he says the decisions he makes about new media in his company are governed by the need to turn a profit and that means for the present time, the Web site he oversees exists mostly as a marketing tool.¹⁷⁷

This is also the case for private broadcasters such as CTV in Canada or major networks in the United States as well as public broadcasters such as PBS: the front pages of their sites are designed first to promote the content they broadcast. For Bolen's peers at the CBC, however, there has been considerable debate about whether the public broadcaster's Web site should emphasize current news stories or should reflect the widest possible view of all content produced by the corporation. What the question this boils down to is whether the CBC Web site should be a product or a marketing tool.

In November of 1998, the cbc.ca Web site, which until then had been a combination of current events and promotion, unveiled a design to emphasize news as the central feature of the site. Since then, the site has used what its designers call the "zone" concept – a design which groups content of different CBC shows under subject headings such as "sports," "consumers" or "kids" – but Webmaster Joe Lawlor says that use of cbc.ca indicates to him that "what people go to the site for now is news." At the same time, Lawlor admits that prominence of news on the site has been a "political issue" at the corporation, debated between staff who like the

¹⁷⁷ Bolen, Norm – interview April 12, 2001

emphasis on news and those who argue that other CBC programming fails to get a sufficiently high profile on the site.¹⁷⁸

A main figure in the development of the site and one who supports its emphasis on journalistic content is Ken Wolff, a former CBC Radio producer and the creator of *Newsworld* Online, the site developed for the corporation's television news cable channel. In the spring of 1996, before all of CBC's Web sites had been consolidated and when the site that Lawlor operated was filled mostly with promotional content and sound files, *Newsworld* Online developed the corporation's first regularly-updated news Web site.¹⁷⁹ Today, Wolff argues that the strength of cbc.ca should be based on information content that is useful rather than on promotional content for CBC's other media services.

"How many times are you going to read Peter Mansbridge's bio, or how useful is it to Canadians to have a site for *Davinci's Inquest*?" he says. "That's promotional – to get the CBC brand out there – but it's where you get the conundrum."¹⁸⁰

Wolff says the news page of cbc.ca site has consistently been the Web site's most popular page, with use of it peaking at noon hour, when many people check the site from their offices.¹⁸¹ He adds that the wisdom of emphasizing news has been demonstrated at times when major news stories prompted significant numbers

¹⁷⁸ Lawlor, Joe – interview April 12, 2001

¹⁷⁹ Wolff, Ken – interview February 16, 2001

¹⁸⁰ Wolff, Ken – interview February 16, 2001

¹⁸¹ Wolff, Ken – interview March 7, 2002

of online users to access the CBC site. For an example, he notes that within days of the death of Pierre Trudeau in October 2000, over a thousand e-mails were posted on the cbc.ca's message board and over one million page views were registered by the site, accounting for as many page views as took place on cbc.ca in all of 1999.¹⁸² Wolff believes such reaction demonstrates that when Canadians look for both information and a forum for reflection on major events in their country, the CBC is among their top choices.

"I think people come to the CBC site because they want a brand of CBC news," he says.¹⁸³

Wolff's reference to a CBC "brand" of news displays an interesting evolution in the corporation, one that has grown at the same time as the CBC has developed its online services. Years ago, it's doubtful that people such as Wolff would have referred to the kind of journalism they produced as a "brand" – a term that many public broadcasters would have felt smacked of commercialism – too close to the content produced by what CBC staff refer to as "the privates."

Today though, the notion of "brand" – the immediate identification link between a name or logo and the product or service it provides – is a major consideration at the CBC. In the development of its online operations, this especially has been the case in a chicken and egg sort of way: those inclined to celebrate the content of the site say it is a valued public service to Canadians who use the CBC as their source of news and information for decades, while those who

¹⁸² Persaud, Marlyn – interview February 16, 2001

¹⁸³ Wolff, Ken – interview February 16, 2001

value new media as a marketing tool say it helps to drive its users back to CBC Radio and Television – in public relations terms, that it “extends the brand.”

“The CBC has a huge brand,” says Paul Stainton, a former CBC Radio producer who now is one of those responsible for communications and marketing of the CBC’s online operations. “We did a branding study that showed that if you put the CBC logo beside an image of a red maple leaf, the CBC logo was seen as being more Canadian.”¹⁸⁴

On a larger scale south of the border, Stainton says that the kind of recognition that the CBC generates would be worth billions of dollars if achieved by American corporate giants such as Nike or Coca Cola. He feels that branding has played an important role in the development of CBC’s online operations, in that cbc.ca was faced with “the decision to promote all of our content areas poorly or do one really well.” Stainton says it chose to focus on news, not just out of a sense of public service, but because it was considered the best means to emphasize the CBC brand. It’s a brand of which Stainton is proud, one that helps him to see his marketing efforts as supporting a public service.

“The biggest issue I found is that, in the outside world, an Internet property is seen as being a very focussed marketing property, but within the CBC, what we put out on it is our journalism and programs,” he says. “Having a marketing input without changing the journalism content has been an interesting balance to strike.”¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁴ Stainton, Paul – interview February 15, 2001

¹⁸⁵ Stainton, Paul – interview February 15, 2001

Stainton admits that striking this balance has been a challenge, given an internal CBC culture dominated by journalists who either ignore marketing and communications or who view it with scepticism. One person outside the CBC who has witnessed this reluctance about mixing the corporation's marketing with its content is Adam Froman, president of the online marketing consulting firm Delvinia.

The CBC never has been an organization focused on marketing. Their focus has been about programming and not about how to build a relationship with its audience. We did a study for CBC and told them you have this huge audience of Canadians who watch and know the CBC and you want to build a relationship with them through whatever channel they want their information. Getting Peter Mansbridge to say 'if you want more information, go to cbc.ca' – the idea that the branding of the CBC became cbc.ca – getting this idea of cross-divisional branding across was a challenge."¹⁸⁶

For Froman, branding doesn't need to be solely about making money, nor does it have to compromise the public service goals of a corporation such as the CBC. Rather, he sees branding as a way to clarify the CBC's identity as a Canadian communicator. He argues that, rather than compromising the content of the CBC's programming, good branding could strengthen two-way communication between the CBC and its audience, and he sees the CBC's online operations as the best tool the corporation has to improve this communication.

Mark Hyland, CBC's director of broadband and digital services, agrees that the Internet has the potential to place "power with the listener and viewer to choose what they want to receive," but he says that the CBC is still learning how to use the

¹⁸⁶ Froman, Adam – interview February 16, 2001

information it can gather through the Internet.¹⁸⁷ What he feels has been learned so far is that CBC audiences do not want advertising on the corporation's new media, something that is disputed by people such as Adam Froman. Froman says his market research shows that, among Canadian media Web sites, not only does the CBC receive high performance ratings from its users, but that banner ads on the CBC site have no effect on what users think of the site or on how much they trust the content of CBC's online journalism.¹⁸⁸ Despite such data, however, the subject of advertising on CBC Web sites has prompted some of the most divisive discussions in the corporation's new media services.

As has been explained, the birth of CBC's online operations took place at a time when the corporation was very focused on raising revenue. Diane Williamson, the manager of *Radioworks*, saw the Internet as a vehicle for the CBC to sell transcripts, tapes and other corporate merchandise. When Perrin Beatty began allocating money to new media in 1996, he gave responsibility for the service to John Lewis, previously a senior CBC business manager. To support growth of online operations through the late 90s, Lewis developed several business models of how the corporation could use the Internet to generate revenue from CBC merchandise (clothing, records etc.) and CBC services (transcripts of shows, rentals of CBC facilities). He made no excuses for such commercial plans, noting both that government cuts had forced the corporation to look for new ways to generate revenue and that a boom in communication networks made the Internet look like a

¹⁸⁷ Hyland, Mark – interview February 15, 2001

¹⁸⁸ Froman, Adam – interview February 16, 2001

place where money could be made. It was a direction, however, that received mixed reaction within the corporation.

“In early days, we were building all sorts of commercialization into the site,” says Lewis. “The television people didn’t have a problem with that because that’s what they were used to, but the radio people had a tough time with that and resisted and objected and it didn’t go well with them at all.”¹⁸⁹

This wasn’t surprising, as most television programming at the CBC included commercials while radio had been commercial-free since 1971.

Lewis opened up the site to banner advertising from clients who were attracted by the demographics of the CBC’s online audience, the most notable of these companies being the book retailer, Chapters. While some radio staff were uncomfortable with the partnership, their managers took a more pragmatic approach and tolerated the banner ads once CBC president Perrin Beatty made it clear that new media was to be a corporate priority. The Vice-President of Radio, Alex Frame, says that once Beatty allocated funds to new media operations, other managers believed that the sooner the online operations could pay for themselves, the better.

In 1999, the view of online advertising changed at the CBC head office when Robert Rabinovitch took over as President of the corporation. Rabinovitch rejected the idea that new media could be a prime means for the CBC to raise private revenue. This was all part of what Matthew Fraser says was Rabinovitch’s way of declaring that “in effect, that under his leadership, the CBC would stick to

¹⁸⁹ Lewis, John – interview January 12, 2001

its public service knitting.”¹⁹⁰ According to John Lewis, this resulted in a review of the corporation’s policies on advertising, with Rabinovitch signalling his view that for the CBC to be more distinctive, it needed to reduce advertising on all media, including its Web site.¹⁹¹

Pierre Belanger, then in charge of new media for the radio network of *Radio-Canada* at the time, says the new president’s concern about online ads was influenced partly by an event that took place in December of 1999. Belanger had agreed to place, for a short time, what he terms today a “very aggressive pop-up ad” for Molson breweries on the culture page of the SRC Web site. The first day the ad was in place, it was discovered by his boss, Sylvain Lafrance, who oversaw both French radio and new media. Belanger remembers that the reaction was less than positive.

He says “listen kiddo, this is French radio and there is no advertising on our programs, nor will there ever be on our Web sites. You’ve got about 24 hours to pull this thing out of there. There’s no way we’re going to prostitute ourselves. Radio doesn’t have advertising, especially beer commercials,” recalls Belanger. “Two or three weeks later Sylvain went to Rabinovitch and said, “I’ve got an idea, I think we should pull out of advertising completely, except for the Olympic games,” and Rabinovitch went along with it.”¹⁹²

The policy that resulted eliminated ads from all online operations involving CBC Radio and also extended to online content that grew out of certain types of television programming: arts, children’s shows, news and current affairs.

¹⁹⁰ Fraser, Matthew. *The CBC’s choice: Constellations or core competencies*. Policy Options. September 2000. p. 43
[<http://www.irpp.org/po/archive/po0900.htm#fraser>]

¹⁹¹ Lewis, John – interview January 12, 2001

¹⁹² Belanger, Pierre – interview January 14, 2002

Other than these areas, advertising was permitted on pages whose TV programs carried ads, a move that was important to pages dedicated to CBC sports programming.¹⁹³ The corporation might have been willing to sacrifice advertising on the pages of shows such as *This Morning* or *The National*, but was not going to lose out on marketing opportunities for *Molson Hockey Night in Canada* or coverage of the Olympics.

From his vantage point at CTV, Kirk Lapointe says he admires the CBC for taking a stand against letting advertising dominate its Web site, but he expects that many in the corporation will continue to look for some sort of marketing yardstick by which to measure the wisdom of investing in online media.

It's getting back to the roots of public broadcasting because it's not commercially driven, but how long that can last, I don't know because the commercialization of CBC TV has been profound. I think the best thing to say if you're at the CBC is that, with a certain amount of prayer, you hope the online presentation is attracting the next wave of your broadcasting audience, and even if you're not necessarily bringing ads into your online work you can bring the person who's experiencing it over to your broadcasting and that will pay dividends for you.¹⁹⁴

The CBC is not the only public broadcaster to consider advertising as a means by which to raise revenue, but while it started out accepting advertising and has since moved away from such thinking, others have gone in the opposite direction.

¹⁹³ Lewis, John – interview January 12, 2001

¹⁹⁴ Lapointe, Kirk – interview January 13, 2002

In 1995, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation launched ABC Online, an online service that today employs over 40 full-time staff.¹⁹⁵ Although ABC Online began as a commercial-free operation, the corporation has moved in recent years to look for ways to raise commercial revenue through its new media services. It began with talks between the ABC and *Telstra*, an Australian telecommunications company, over linking ABC news pages to *Telstra* in a way similar to the links in Canada that go to cbc.ca from MSN and AOL.¹⁹⁶ The talks eventually broke down when the ABC and the private company could not agree over the amount of editorial influence that *Telstra* might have over the ABC content it would display, an issue which the CBC has not faced in Canada because MSN and AOL do not alter the content of the CBC material they carry.¹⁹⁷

Debate over ABC Online also emerged when the corporation openly spoke about adding advertising to its sight. The public outcry over this, coupled with the *Telstra* talks, prompted legislators to act. A group of Australian senators introduced a bill to prevent ABC Online from carrying ads or making links to commercial

¹⁹⁵ Australian Broadcasting Corporation. *ABC Online - a Short History*.
[<http://www.abc.net.au/about/>]

¹⁹⁶ Camphuisan, Alicia. *Telstra and ABC content deal off*. australia.internet.com.
June 13, 2000
[<http://australia.internet.com/r/article/jsp/sid/646862>]

¹⁹⁷ Lewis, John – interview January 12, 2001

sites.¹⁹⁸ Vicki Bourne, a Democrat senator in the Australian parliament, outlined the reasons for the proposed legislation in her explanation of the bill.

We raised concerns about the creeping commercialization of the ABC in a climate of substantial reductions in public funding. There were fears that the ABC was becoming increasingly reliant upon external funds, and that further pressures to accept external funding for programming, either directly or through advertising, may become more intense if the funding crisis continues. We were concerned that the proposed deal between the ABC and any other third party had the potential to compromise of the ABC's editorial independence and integrity through a dependence on commercial revenues through fees, which itself imposes a commercial imperative. The Democrats are absolutely opposed to the ABC operating services solely for the purpose of deriving commercial revenues.¹⁹⁹

While the legislation has yet to proceed, it demonstrates, as was mentioned earlier in the discussion of BBC Online, that while the CBC has experienced internal debate about its operations, such discussions have not erupted in the public. There are those, however, those who feel that the use of ads compromises the credibility of a public broadcaster's online service, there are others who argue that Web site advertising should never have been a method for a corporation such as the CBC to have expected to raise revenue. One such person is communications consultant David Ellis.

There are three things that the CBC should do. First, beat others at your own game and give people smart news. Second, be ready that ads will have a shrinking role on the Web and transactions will be how people will make money. Third, understand that, while everyone wants the Web to be like television – and this is awkward for the CBC – traffic isn't going to be the be all and end all. That's good

¹⁹⁸ Bourne, Vicki. *Additional Comments by Senator Vicki Bourne to Inquiry into ABC Online*. Parliament of Australia, Senate. Senate Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts Committee. [http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/ecita_ctte/abcfinalrep/04AD.pdf]

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

news for CBC (online operations) because the competition will be out there fighting a losing battle for ad revenues.²⁰⁰

Ellis believes the initial key to success and profit for online communications will not be from e-commerce and traditional retail activities, but rather, from the sale of content specifically adapted for the Internet. Consistent with the opinion of several Internet consultants, and as will be examined later, Ellis feels that some of the most exciting opportunities for CBC New Media to carve out a forward looking identity on the Internet will be through interactivity, the factor that created such interest around the *Napster* file-sharing service.²⁰¹

For now, the CBC has dropped the idea of generating revenue from most of its online operations. However, this is not to say that the corporation has dropped its view of the Web site being a tool to showcase its other operations.

"People identify very readily with the CBC brand. It has made the crossover from television and radio to the Internet smoother," says Adrian Mills, the former managing director of cbc.ca²⁰² While keen to expand the online services, managers such as Mills view new media as a vehicle to build the profile of the CBC's brand, thus creating a dual role for the service and adding to the difference of views in the corporation between those who view online communication as a marketing tool for CBC services and those who see it as a distinct new medium with its own possibilities for expression.²⁰³

²⁰⁰ Ellis, David. – interview May 11, 2001

²⁰¹ Ellis, David. – interview May 11, 2001

²⁰² Mills, Adrian – interview February 16, 2001

²⁰³ Mills, Adrian – interview February 16, 2001

While many people applaud the change that Rabinovitch's anti-commercialism direction has brought to the CBC, it is unfortunate that people such as John Lewis appear to have wasted considerable effort in devising online revenue schemes that were shelved when the new president determined the corporation needed a new emphasis on public service and public funding.

At least for now, however, the CBC finally has determined that a main focus of its new media operations will not be to make money. This decision, though, does not hide the considerable efforts that were made to raise revenue via new media – efforts that might have been different had it received a warmer reception in the corporation.

What the CBC now needs to establish with its online operations is the balance of publicity versus public service – whether the priority for its Web site will be to send online users to the corporation's radio and television services or to display its own unique content.

PART 8 - GO WEST YOUNG INTERNET: THE “OTHER” CBC ONLINE

When people such as Perrin Beatty and Robert Rabinovitch speak about new media as a new “platform” on which to display the CBC’s “conventional services,” some people in the corporation – especially those producing programs aimed at younger listeners – don’t agree with this idea. These people see the Internet differently than some of their colleagues in the CBC and the story of the online services that they developed and their past isolation in the corporation illustrates some of the challenges the CBC has had in developing a unified approach to developing new media.

One such group, based mostly at CBC in Vancouver, sees the Internet as a medium unto itself – one that needs to create its own form of content rather than extending the content of current media. This group has set out to create a second CBC online service that has little to do with the operation in Toronto. Not only do its producers have a different view of the Internet, its roots are based in national CBC Radio programs that have a different background than the national programs on CBC Radio produced in Toronto.

The best-known CBC Radio shows based in Toronto have been part of the Radio Current Affairs and Features department: programs such *Morningside*, *As it Happens* or *Quirks and Quarks*. By contrast, network radio programming from CBC Vancouver has been highlighted by shows such as *Gabereau*, *Double Exposure* or *Basic Black*, all of which were created by the CBC’s Radio Variety department. While the main focus of CBC Radio staff in Toronto has been on information, network shows at CBC Vancouver have been based more on

entertainment. In addition, CBC Vancouver also has had a strong contingent of producers who have recorded and presented various kinds of music: among them, Robert Ouimet. His development of the program *Realtime* is a prime example of Radio vice-president Alex Frame's view that CBC online work developed in a "fragmentary way."²⁰⁴

Filled with alternative rock music and fast-paced and irreverent banter, *Realtime* was produced by a team led by Ouimet, hosted by Leora Cornfeld, and aired Saturday nights on CBC Stereo (later renamed Radio Two) starting in the fall of 1994. At first, *Realtime* had one major difference from all other programs on CBC Radio at the time: it aired live for three hours, across all five time Canadian time zones. That meant broadcasting for eight hours, which *Realtime* accomplished by a practice in the CBC known as bicycling: introducing content live but recycling the taped segments and music over the different zones and in different parts of the show (as opposed to a program such as *This Morning*, which broadcasts once to the Atlantic provinces and is aired by tape delay across the country's time zones). The staff at *Realtime*, however, had even grander ideas than programming live for the radio.

"The target audience of *Realtime* was young," recalls Ouimet." We decided we had to talk to them in places where they were as opposed to them coming to us on the radio. They weren't listening to the radio and we knew Internet was big part

²⁰⁴ Frame, Alex – interview February 15, 2001

of their lives and we knew we needed to do stuff on the Internet. We were really excited about the idea of streaming audio and that wasn't far away.”²⁰⁵

In the spring of 1995, the crew from *Realtime* got in touch with Real Networks in Seattle, the company that created *Real Audio*, the digital system that has dominated audio transmission on the Internet since it began.²⁰⁶ They told their contacts at the company that they wanted to attempt to broadcast live audio over the Internet, and in September of that year, *Realtime* carried out its first transmission over Real Networks. Ouimet says that apart from an Internet transmission of a Seattle Mariners baseball game days earlier, the *Realtime* transmission marked the first live stream of a complete network radio show ever carried out on the Internet.

When I look back at this, we phoned the V.P. Real Networks and said “the technology seems to be in place now, we can get the signal to you and we've got this great show coming up on Saturday, we'd really like to do it this week,” and they said “we'll get back to you” and they called us back on the Tuesday and said, “yeah, we'll do it.” There was no agreement or big formal thing. We sent them a signal out of our control room and it came out on the Internet. It was wild.²⁰⁷

Realtime was important to the CBC because it did two things. First, it aired on the radio in each time zone for three hours and on the Internet for the entire eight hours, thus serving both radio and Internet audiences. Second, it demonstrated how the interactivity of online communications could be used in the broadcast of a program. Interactivity itself was nothing new to radio – it's been a basic principle for decades of phone-in shows such as CBC Radio's *Cross Country Check-Up*. The interesting thing about the Internet was that unlike on phone-in programs, its users

²⁰⁵ Ouimet, Robert – interview December 16, 2001

²⁰⁶ Ouimet, Robert – interview December 16, 2001

²⁰⁷ Ouimet, Robert – interview December 16, 2001

could communicate with those producing the show without making such comments on the air. The result was that if someone e-mailed the show commenting that an interview was going too long, it might be cut short. Ouimet says the idea was to let listeners help to program the show.

We discovered quite quickly that the real power was in using it (the Internet) while we were on the air. People could have a say in what we did, and for me, that's where the lights went on. I realized this wasn't just a way we could promote or publicize what we were doing but where people could be actively involved in what we were doing as we were doing it. The host would be on the air and in the chat room on her screen she was seeing people talk about her talking to this person and she was seeing people saying "this guy's lame," or "that was a lame question."²⁰⁸

News of *Realtime* began to spread within the CBC. Bob Kerr, overseeing the online operations in Toronto, says the show "built quite a following."²⁰⁹ Alex Frame looks back on it as part of the genesis of online work at the CBC.²¹⁰ Based on his experience of streaming the show on the Internet, Ouimet concluded that the live streaming capabilities of the new medium could play a strong role in the future of the CBC, but he says that his CBC colleagues in eastern Canada had little interest in the idea.

What was striking at the time was that at the CBC at the time, the idea of audio over the Internet wasn't taken even remotely seriously. The reaction was always, "well, it just sounds like shit," and we kept saying "yeah, it does today, but it won't forever," and the answer was "yeah, but it still sounds like shit". I was at a meeting John Lewis put together in the fall of '95 and I remember saying we, the CBC, should think about providing this as a paying service – streaming audio for other people. We have the technology and we know how to broadcast and we're on

²⁰⁸ Ouimet, Robert – interview December 16, 2001

²⁰⁹ Kerr, Bob – interview May 14, 2001

²¹⁰ Frame, Alex – interview February 15, 2001

the ground at an early date and everybody in the group said, "why would we want to do that?" But we were the first in the door.²¹¹

Realtime lasted two years and was cancelled in 1996. Ouimet says it was dropped because "Radio Two was a classical network and we were playing wild and crazy music and they didn't get it." He says that fans of the show sent over 1,200 e-mails protesting its cancellation, but today he's interested mostly in the legacy of *Realtime*.

We learned that interactivity wasn't just click here to go there or to send e-mail. Interactivity was "I'm on the Internet and I do something and something changes because I did it," and in our case it was a radio show that people could change.²¹²

The experience of *Realtime* grew into a new online service four years later that the CBC dubbed Radio 3. Radio 3 is not actually a radio operation, but an online operation run by Robert Ouimet and 20 staff in Vancouver. Originally, the name referred to a proposed youth-oriented audio network that CBC had hoped to launch on both the Web and on FM frequencies in some of the country's medium and smaller cities (getting an FM licence in centres such as Toronto and Vancouver would have proven difficult, given the crowded radio markets in those cities). When the proposal for the service was rejected by the CRTC during the CBC's 1999 licence hearings, and was later deferred by Robert Rabinovitch, Ouimet proposed a scaled-down operation to explore new forms of online media that would

²¹¹ Ouimet, Robert – interview December 16, 2001

²¹² Ouimet, Robert – interview December 16, 2001

include more complicated graphics and both audio and video content that would be aimed at aimed at younger users.²¹³

Radio 3 premiered in July 2000 with the launch of 120seconds.com, a digital story site whose name referred to the short attention span of the young audience it planned to target. "What we think Radio3 will do is create that same national sense of community among young people as CBC Radio has developed among the rest of the population," says Alex Frame.²¹⁴

Today, Radio 3 consists of three Web sites: 120seconds.com, NewMusicCanada.com, which features audio clips of new Canadian musical performers, and JustConcerts.com, a site that has carried video clips over one thousand new Canadian bands in performance. Unlike the largely journalistic prose of cbc.ca, the sites mounted by Radio 3 have a different tone in their text.

"By focusing on just one thing – getting the best on-stage and backstage coverage of concerts in Canada – we know we can do it better than the rest, who might have to go home to bed just as the shows are getting good, so they can get up early to sell banner ads and build e-commerce servers or something," boasted JustConcerts.com in January 2002.²¹⁵

²¹³ Ouimet, Robert – interview December 16, 2001

²¹⁴ Frame, Alex – interview February 15, 2001

²¹⁵ JustConcerts.com. [<http://justconcerts.com/about/about.cfm>]

“That’s right, this is a private party. Canadian music only. We’re here to support our own. But if you don’t have a passport and like what you hear – that’s cool with us,” says NewMusicCanada.²¹⁶

“An Idea. A Web site. A CBC Initiative. A community. A cult (we wish),” is how 120Seconds.com describes itself.²¹⁷

In December of 2001 Radio 3 also launched *Home Delivery*, a pilot project to deliver what it terms “full screen media-rich” content based on the stories done by CBC Radio and Television. *Home Delivery* is available only to those who download special software and just as is the case with other Radio 3 offerings, is best downloaded by users who have broadband Internet services.

Ouimet says the sites have proven a worthwhile investment for the corporation, noting that over a thousand Canadian bands have submitted music to JustConcerts.com and that 120second.com has been nominated for several awards, including the *Webbies*, which he describes as the “Oscars” of Web site design. The site uses a Web technology called *Flash*, which allows for story telling with a more animated use of graphics and images than is usually found on most text-based Web sites. Rather than carrying the latest news, 120seconds.com carries more offbeat fare. In March 2002, the site carried a feature titled “Hidden Geniuses,” in which six people were put through several steps of a “creativity challenge,” the results were posted on the site and users were invited to vote on the person who displayed the most creativity.

²¹⁶ NewMusicCanada.com. [<http://www.newmusiccanada.com/about/about.cfm>]

²¹⁷ 120seconds.com. [<http://www.120seconds.com/index.cfm>]

Reviews of Radio 3 have been mixed. One fan was Liam Mitchell, a Journalism student at the University of British Columbia.

Describing 120 is difficult because it is more an experience than a product. Producers call it "an experimental new media site." The promotional material calls it a "multi-media story telling site." Parents call it "obnoxious." Regardless of how you describe it, 120 has a method that is producing not only awards, but also innovative coverage.²¹⁸

Internet writer and consultant Wayne McPhail is less positive about the service. He says that, while he understands that it is aimed at young users, he feels that 120seconds.com is a "usability nightmare."

They're spending more time on the look than they are on the content. Look at something like the Quebec Summit coverage. When you peeled away all the eye candy, it was essentially not very good writing and mediocre photography wrapped in this all-singing-all-dancing interface that I don't think most people coming to the site would find it terribly useful if they just wanted to get the information. I don't need to have buttons fade in and out and make goofy sounds – I just need to get information. It has some responsibility to do some interesting stuff, but to make it accessible to the general public because that's who's paying for it. If I were a computer user using 120seconds.com, I'd be asking why am I paying for this when I can't even use it. That just pisses people off.²¹⁹

McPhail is not the only one to question the ease of the site's use. A few months after the launch of 120seconds.com, *The King's Journalism Review* asked a group of teens – the target audience for the site – to review its contents. Their reactions were mixed.

Next they go to a series of videos about biking, skateboarding, snowboarding and skiing, called Gravity Sucks.

"It's pleasure. It's pain. It's pure adrenaline," Dave reads and groans. "I was so down with this Web site until I saw that. That is so written by a 37-year-old. As a skateboarder that offends me deeply."

²¹⁸ Mitchell, Liam. Op. Cit.

²¹⁹ McPhail, Wayne – interview January 13, 2002

Within minutes the four are fed up with the skateboard story and go on to a snowboarding video. With the hip hop beats in the background and the growing volume of their voices over it, the King's College computer room starts to sound like there's a party going on. The opinions are flowing.

"This is better than the last one," says Amanda, watching the video of skiers and snowboarders speeding down steep slopes and doing flips. "It doesn't have a plot. I'd rather just watch people in action."

"If CBC wants to use this as a way for young people to talk about their lives, says Morgan, "I think there's better things you can put in this space."

Dave says: "If this is an outlet for people who are making cool videos and film, Canadian people, I think that's cool, regardless of what's on there. It's just cool to have an outlet."²²⁰

In the same article, 120seconds.com producer Carma Livingston gave her assessment to such reaction.

We want to be all things to all people. But because the standards are so varied in Web world we just can't. The mission of 120seconds is to create an experimental ground where we can figure out what the heck to do with this medium and it's a place for people our age to figure that out. You see a lot of other media applied to the Web like radio, print, television, but the Web as a medium hasn't really come to fruition yet.²²¹

Whatever one thinks of the content and design of Radio 3, the operation demonstrates that there are people in the CBC who feel the corporation has room for greater experimentation on the Web than is displayed on its main site, cbc.ca. Also evident, though, is the gulf that exists between Radio 3 and cbc.ca: there is no obvious link to Radio 3 on the front page of cbc.ca (it is included under the radio service's links) and entering the Radio 3 name into the search window of cbc.ca turns up only links to press releases about Radio 3 rather than to the operation itself. Stories conflict as to why the link has such little prominence on the cbc.ca

²²⁰ Block, Jessica. *120seconds.com: The CBC goes chasing after the young audience it has lost -- and tries to "figure out what the heck to do with this computer medium."* The King's Journalism Review. October 22, 2000.

²²¹ Ibid.

site: Robert Ouimet says he has asked for such a link for a long time but was ignored by online managers in Toronto, while Ken Wolff says that the staff at Radio 3 never wanted the link in order to downplay any association Radio 3 might have to the demographically-older CBC.

Apart from the lack of connection between cbc.ca and Radio 3, Pierre Belanger says there has been little communication between CBC head office and the Vancouver operation. He says that, apart from radio vice president Alex Frame, senior managers at the CBC have almost no connection to Radio 3.

“It’s a new media project and Sylvain Lafrance doesn’t even know how to spell Radio 3,” he says, referring to the Vice-President for French radio, who is also the most senior manager overseeing new media for the corporation. “He has no say whatsoever in this project. And is it a radio project or a new media project? Frame will say it’s a radio project, but how’s that? It’s only available on the Web.”²²²

Frame, the Vice-President for English Radio, says he funds the operation because he believes that when the original idea for Radio 3 was shelved, the CBC still needed some sort of low profile “research and development facility” for online media.²²³ In some ways, this makes Radio 3 sounds like a modern-day attempt to experiment with new media in the way that some CBC producers altered the sound of CBC Radio three decades ago. This is worth a brief comparison.

CBC officials often look to what they call the “radio revolution” as the period when CBC Radio created the mixture of news and current affairs that still

²²² Belanger, Pierre – interview January 14, 2002

²²³ Frame, Alex. – interview Feb. 15, 2001

dominates the sound of CBC Radio One today. When he introduced Alex Frame at the CBC licence hearings in 1999, Perrin Beatty referred to Frame as “a pioneer member of the radio revolution at CBC Radio, which led to the re-invention of radio really during the 1970s.”²²⁴ Clay Carter, a former CBC Radio producer, argues that the CBC’s so-called “revolution” did not emerge, as most CBC histories state, from a corporate overhaul of radio programming, but from the actions of individual shows and producers.

If it was acknowledged that the radio revolution was the product of maverick producers spawned by the dynamic social changes of the 1960s, it would seem to have been the result of luck, or, what was worse, as a case of the tail wagging the dog. It would certainly not be seen as an official CBC plan to manage change to radio. It was thus prudent to recognize management's planned evolution of the program changes and the report, which catalogued it.²²⁵

Although it works in a different medium, when Radio 3 is viewed in its context in the corporation, it seems similar to the programs and innovations that eventually changed CBC’s radio schedule. If Carter is correct about the “tail wagging the dog” events that led to changes in CBC Radio, it may be worth considering that over three decades later, Radio 3 producers could end up similarly helping to shape the corporation’s online media. How soon this might happen seems uncertain, given that Radio 3 seems to be treated more as an isolated experiment than as any sort of template for the corporation’s other online operations.

²²⁴ Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission. *Transcripts of Proceedings for the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, CBC Licence Renewals. Volume 1.* 1999

²²⁵ Carter, Clay, *The CBC Radio Revolution: 1964–1976, A Re-examination.* Ottawa: Carleton University, School of Journalism, 1990. p. 143

The isolation of Radio 3 demonstrates further the lack of a clear leader for CBC's online services and the lack of a unity over the goals of the corporation's new media efforts. Without some connection between those who create its main site in Toronto and the work of those Radio 3, CBC's main services will continue to treat youth-oriented aspects of the Internet as material produced by, what communications analyst David Ellis calls "a bunch of guys with purple hair in the basement."²²⁶

This may be changing at the CBC: its radio service currently is considering programming changes aimed at attracting more listeners between 35 and 49 years of age and Adrian Mills says that any new programming proposals will have to include an online element.²²⁷ This may do little to raise the profile of Radio 3, whose operation seems to generate as much or more attention from university media than it does from others in its own corporation.

²²⁶ Ellis, David. – interview May 11, 2001

²²⁷ Mills, Adrian – interview February 16, 2001

PART 9 – A MEDIUM ITSELF OR AN EXTENSION OF OTHERS: THE DEBATE INSIDE CBC OVER THE ROLE OF ITS ONLINE POTENTIAL

Although referred to as new media, online communication is not the first new medium to arrive at the CBC and the corporation's entry onto the Web is not the first time it has had to face the effect that a new medium could have on older media. For this reason, it's worth looking at the impact that the arrival of television had on CBC's radio operation in the 1950s, how this compares with the development of new media and how it has affected the differing views about the uniqueness of online communications and the best route for its development.

In 1954, two years after it the CBC began broadcasting television, the corporation launched its own TV news service, despite the view of some CBC managers who felt that "television was no place for news."²²⁸ TV news did not, by many accounts, produce the most stimulating programming at first, with many stories consisting of little more than an announcer reading script in front of an uninspiring backdrop. In short, it lived up to the tag of being radio with pictures.

As the fifties progressed, however, television technicians and journalists developed new equipment and new methods to tell stories that took TV out of the studio and into the streets. The power of the medium was demonstrated in Canada when John Diefenbaker won the leadership of the federal Progressive Conservative Party in 1956 and went on to fight the federal election of 1957. As Knowlton Nash writes, "TV viewers were fascinated by the flamboyant prairie political evangelist,

²²⁸ Nash, Knowlton. Op. Cit. p. 240

who seemed such a refreshing change from the staid, atrophied Liberals. On TV, Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent was the epitome of grey.”²²⁹

As sales of TV sets proved, demand for the medium grew rapidly through the fifties. While just one in 10 households owned a TV set in 1953, a decade later that number had risen to 90 per cent of the nation's homes.²³⁰ Some radio producers wondered if the sun was setting on their medium. American broadcaster and industry executive Jack Brown was one of them.

Most people agreed that radio was dead. Radio was my career at the time, and I asked a senior broadcaster if he believed that. He told me that in his grandfather's day, everyone had horses. Then, he said, along came the automobile. Horses didn't disappear, he observed, but they just weren't so important anymore.²³¹

Radio did not disappear, but would change to what CBC Radio's program director, Bruce Raymond, termed “the role of informer and companion-at-large.”²³² The development of the transistor made it portable, and commercial radio station owners created two forms of programming that would not be adopted by TV: the “top 40” disc jockey for listeners who wanted to hear music, and the open-line host for listeners who preferred talk radio. CBC Radio, however, was slower to adapt. Communications analyst Paul Rutherford writes that it, “by contrast, turned to minority programming for housewives, music buffs, intellectuals, news addicts,

²²⁹ Ibid. p. 254

²³⁰ Rutherford, Paul. *When television was young: primetime Canada 1952-1967*. Toronto, University of Toronto Press. 1990. p.51

²³¹ Keith, Michael C. *Talking Radio: An Oral History of American Radio in the Television Age*. 2000. p. 11

²³² Irving, John A. (ed). *Mass Media in Canada*. 1962. p. 99

New Canadians, culture vultures, native peoples and the like.” When the corporation surveyed listeners in 1959 and asked how they would describe CBC Radio if it were a person, the profile that came back was of “a somewhat remote, disagreeable, aloof Britisher.”²³³

The sixties was not an easy era for CBC Radio, and it would take the service most of the decade to change programming to the kind of blend of news and current affairs that dominates its schedule today. It also was not an easy time for the budget of CBC Radio: in a 1978 report to the CRTC, the CBC openly admitted the problems of the two decades before, noting that, “the introduction of Canadian television resulted within months in the draining of resources away from radio.”²³⁴ The difference between the radio and television services was not just about money, it was about attitude and this affected the approaches the two services took to the stories they told Canadians. The core of CBC Radio's information programming was news, delivered in a stoic and scripted style felt to be out of touch with the times. Columnist Dennis Braithwaite wrote in 1966 that, “if there is an art of TV speaking, it has yet to pique the interest of CBC news writers and announcers. They still follow the old radio ways, and are usually producing for both, since the audio part of TV film is generally used for a radio broadcast as well.”²³⁵

²³³ Taylor, Alison. *Window on the world: a history of women in C.B.C. radio talks and public affairs, 1936-1966*. M.A. Thesis, Carleton University. 1985. p. 112

²³⁴ Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. *The CBC—A Perspective: vol. 1–3. Submission to the Canadian Radio and Television and Telecommunications Commission I Support of Applications for Renewal of Network Licenses*. 1978. p.72

²³⁵ Bergeron, Rosemary. *The Presentation of News on CBC Television 1953–1988*. M.A. Thesis, Carleton University. 1990. p. 94

CBC Radio spent most of the 1960s broadcasting network entertainment programs, music features and newscasts – the kind of programming it had carried in the 1950s. The result was that it ceased to be a major force in the development of Canadian broadcasting and, as Frank W. Peers wrote in a history of the CBC, “Canadian audiences in the early 1960s accepted the radio fare provided them with few complaints. Perhaps they were merely resigned to it.”

CBC Television producers, on the other hand, created a different form of information programming that they called public affairs. The most famous example of this was the infamous *This Hour has Seven Days*, which ran from 1964 to 1966. Shows such as *Seven Days* helped to change CBC Radio and communications scholar Mark Raboy has pointed out that the CBC news service had a policy that “news would never be presented in such a way as to encourage antagonisms which could be dangerous to national unity.”²³⁶ It was a different matter in public affairs programming, where journalists had more creative and editorial freedom to deal with controversial topics.

When the CBC started its television service in the early 1950s, it is unlikely that many people foresaw the effect it might have on CBC Radio since the new medium appeared to be viewed initially by those in the corporation as a pastime, not a means by which the CBC would tell Canadians about the country or the

²³⁶ Raboy, Marc. *Missed Opportunities: The Story of Canada's Broadcasting Policy*. 1990. p. 142

world. Eventually though, television came to be seen as a medium unto itself and changed radio with its arrival.

Although it has been pointed out in previous chapters that television came to CBC with much more backing and consideration from those in government than was the case with online communications, it still is worth considering the parallels between the two in terms of their evolution as media at the CBC. Both were challenged in their ability to present stories to Canadians. Both presented the CBC with a new challenge of adapting to a new medium. Both helped to drive, and were driven by, technological change in the country. Most important, however, both have faced questions of whether they are new and unique media or simply new technologies by which to carry contents that have originated in other media at the CBC. It is a question that Ken Wolff wrestles with on a regular basis.

Ever since I've been involved with it, I've felt that all I am is a vehicle to put things in a form for people and they'll decide how they want it. I think people come to the CBC site because they want a brand of CBC news and information, but we desperately need more resources because we've been on a plateau. This world changes quickly and we're falling behind in our ability to move ahead in telling stories in new ways, and in order to do that someone has to pay. There's going to be a group of people who will want it and it's important for someone at the top to say this is important to us a public broadcaster, just as important as say, radio.²³⁷

CBC Radio may be important to some Canadians, but Robert Ouimet knows they aren't young. He says that CBC research shows that in the 1970s CBC Radio was heard by between 12 and 14 per cent of Canadians between 25 and 49 years old, but that today, only about one per cent of that same age demographic listens to

²³⁷ Wolff, Ken – interview February 16, 2001

CBC Radio.²³⁸ Apart from his fascination with the medium of the Internet, Ouimet is pragmatic about its ability to rebuild a younger CBC audience and dissatisfied with the amount of money the corporation allocates to online media.

It's around \$15 million that the corporation spends on Internet stuff, and on a billion dollar budget, that's pretty pathetic if you think of a medium that has relevance to a large proportion of your audience. I'm biased but if half your audience has said they use that medium 8 or 9 hours a week and you're investing a very small proportion of your media budget then you're kind of missing the boat, particularly with the new audience that's used to the Internet and the rapidity of the information and the breadth of the Internet information they can get. They get up in the morning and turn on the Internet before they turn on the radio and unless we stay aggressively in pursuit of them, we won't have any relevance for them. The idea of a newscast every half hour seems bizarre to them. They say "I want it right now."²³⁹

Wolff and Ouimet produce different kinds of online content for the CBC. At cbc.ca, Wolff acts as a cross between newspaper editor and radio/television news producer, coordinating about 60 staff members in Toronto and other cities, surrounded by the hourly flow of information common to many journalism work places. Ouimet oversees the online work of the three Radio 3 sites and the corporation's latest online project, *Home Delivery*.

What Wolff and Ouimet have in common is that both are concerned about two things in the CBC: the lack of recognition of online as a potential medium unto itself and the lack of a strong leader to represent new media within the corporation. Ouimet is the most direct in his assessment of the treatment it has received from many staff and managers in the CBC.

²³⁸ Ouimet, Robert – interview December 16, 2001

²³⁹ Ouimet, Robert – interview December 16, 2001

Do people embrace it? Some people do. While I see it as a pittance that they're spending (online media) some people see it as \$15 million they're throwing away – I think the views are that divergent. What needs to happen to have a sense of the future? We need someone with strong vision running new media. I don't think that exists now and we are lacking a clearly articulated, high-achieving goal. I can see it meandering the way it has with a few changes here and there, and I joke that I'm doing this now, but this stuff could disappear next week.²⁴⁰

Ouimet is hardly the first CBC producer to feel that commitment by others to his work or his medium is not on solid ground and although he says he is grateful to English radio VP Alex Frame for supporting Radio 3, Frame himself demonstrates an uncertain commitment when he talks about long-term funding for new media services such as Radio 3.

I do know I'm reluctant to invest much money at this point in a mere belief that audiences will grow. I'm more and more thinking that I'll be in a situation where I'll be mounting services and running them for six months and I'll take them down and I'll start again and put something else up, continually testing the market place as opposed to the presumed longevity that we have with most initiatives now. I want a much greater degree of flexibility and responsiveness in the system.²⁴¹

Others are more certain about the role of new media now has in the CBC. Mark Hyland, director of broadband and digital services for CBC, says there has been an acceptance that "people coming to the Web want to have impact on traditional media" so, rather than worrying that new media might need to be independent "because it would be squashed by radio and TV," most people accept that new media services need to become part of the main media lines in the corporation.²⁴² Inside the CBC, this has meant that some online journalists no

²⁴⁰ Ouimet, Robert – interview December 16, 2001

²⁴¹ Frame, Alex – interview Feb. 15, 2001

²⁴² Hyland, Mark – interview February 15, 2001

longer report to cbc.ca, but to senior staff at programs such as *The National*.

Managers such as Frame say the CBC “should not set up a separate silo relative to Internet content but should introduce it to our existing departments and expand the skill set within those departments.”²⁴³

The concern that this raises for Ouimet and Wolff is that giving managers in television and radio more influence over online media content could translate into a compromised new media service that would fail to reach its potential and could end up as mostly a promotional tool for TV and radio. In spite of this, Wolff acknowledges that, for new media to survive in the short term, it’s a shift he must accept.

The only way to exist in this corporation is to get corporate buy-in. For a while it was “these people (new media) seem to be doing good work, so why is everybody mad at them?” Why? Because we didn’t conform to the corporate structure. It was an entity to itself and we got a lot of good people working together, but that never got recognized in the corporation. Now they’re aware of it and want control. The buzzword now is integration and it will soon report to the VPs of radio and television. If we can get them to think it’s their idea, great – then maybe we’ll get some support.²⁴⁴

Following his experiences at *Radio-Canada* and at the CBC’s head office, Pierre Belanger says the position of new media in the corporation isn’t likely to change soon because the CBC and other broadcasters in Canada are stuck in a holding pattern, trying to decide on the role that online services could play in the future.

²⁴³ Frame, Alex – interview Feb. 15, 2001

²⁴⁴ Wolff, Ken – interview February 16, 2001

The big question at the time (it was developed) was if new media was an extension of the traditional components or a silo in and of its own. That was the big question, and it still is, and I'm of two minds about it. We've needed a mentor – a director – somebody from outside the traditional media, someone to rally the troops around some common goals, but at the same time, we're piggy backing on traditional media and it might be too early in this medium's development to think that way. I know the dominant thinking now in the corporation is that it's not ripe to be a medium on its own, that it's basically an offshoot of the four other guys and it's there to redirect people to our programs. Most Web sites are to showcase your prime assets – look at *The Globe and Mail* or what (Jean Karl) Peladeau at Quebecor is doing with Canoe.²⁴⁵

In other words, says Belanger, if new media producers want their service to be seen as a unique and separate medium, they will have to bide their time and hope that its audience reach and influence grow to match those of radio and television. Until then, Robert Rabinovitch's decision that new media operate as an adjunct to other media seems as if it will be the *status quo* at the CBC. This does not please online producers such as Wolff and Ouimet. They believe that, as long as new media lacks a clear leader similar to the French and English vice-presidents of radio and television, the service will lack the ability to argue, at senior levels, for an increased share of the CBC budget. Pierre Belanger backs this view.

"When it does well, who gets the credit?" he asks, noting that the structure of the CBC has clear lines of accountability for other media – accountability that translates into dollars for those media.²⁴⁶

Currently, ultimate responsibility for new media comes under Sylvain Lafrance, who also is the Vice-President for French radio. After working with Lafrance, Belanger says the French radio VP is "not perceived as a knowledgeable

²⁴⁵ Belanger, Pierre – interview January 14, 2002

²⁴⁶ Belanger, Pierre – interview January 14, 2002

leader in new media” and is “constantly challenged” by the online media staff he supervises. Belanger hopes that a CBC management task force that was struck in late 2001 to examine new media will recommend reorganizing the reporting lines of new media to give the service more definition to both its staff and to CBC management.²⁴⁷

Whatever the findings of this group, it seems unlikely that new media will become more autonomous. Belanger notes that, in return for more control over new media, managers in radio and television have absorbed more of its costs in their own budgets. The result is that, while new media funding has remained stable at about \$14 million, only half of that amount appears to be allocated to the service in the CBC’s 2000-2001 Annual Report – the remaining amount is covered in the budgets of the other media services.²⁴⁸

With a budget that is a fraction of the \$150 million spent on English radio and the almost half billion dollars spent on English television, the person in charge of new media might one day get to sit in at senior management meetings, but could hardly be imagined to have significant influence in major financial discussions. As Adrian Mills, the former managing director of cbc.ca puts it, those in new media may have to learn to “eat a little crow and seem to be good corporate kiddies.”²⁴⁹

Even if they succeed in doing this, it will not change the opinion of some CBC online managers that the corporation’s commitment to the future of its new

²⁴⁷ Belanger, Pierre – interview January 14, 2002

²⁴⁸ Belanger, Pierre – interview January 14, 2002

²⁴⁹ Mills, Adrian – interview February 16, 2001

media is far from solid. As was the case with the development of its radio and television services, the CBC's vision of its role on the Internet and the cost it is willing to pay for that role remains a work in progress.

PART 10 – WATCHING THE PUBLIC COMMUNICATOR: OUTSIDE VIEWS OF THE CBC ON THE INTERNET

“I’m proud of what they’re doing now. They’re using the Net exactly the way it should be used to give their audiences choice.”²⁵⁰

That’s what Diane Williamson, the former manager of CBC Radioworks, thinks of the CBC online service that resulted from her efforts in the mid-nineties.

Although not everyone interviewed for this paper gives the CBC as much unqualified praise as does Williamson, most feel that the corporation has created one of the premier Web sites in the country. To put the concerns of those inside the CBC in context, it is worth examining how some Canadians who work with online content outside of the corporation view the achievements and the challenges facing the CBC’s new media operations.

If actions speak louder than words, one only need look to other major online players who have formed partnerships with the CBC, such as MSN, which gets its Canadian news from cbc.ca and which has a direct link to the public broadcaster’s Web page. It is a link, which, according to CBC’s Bob Kerr, generates more than 10 per cent of all the traffic that goes to cbc.ca. America Online has formed a similar partnership, and Ian Hembery, Vice-President of Government Relations and Communications for AOL Canada, says that his company’s decision to make the CBC site its main source of Canadian online news was an easy choice.²⁵¹

²⁵⁰ Williamson, Diane – interview March 15, 2001

²⁵¹ Hembery, Ian – interview February 22, 2001

People such as Industry Canada's Andrew Stephens point to the corporation's move to minimize commercial concerns as a reason to applaud its online work. Stephens credits this kind of approach as being a key to the CBC's early adoption of online media and he believes it needs to continue.

"The first thing that anyone in their right mind would ask is 'are we going to make a profit from this?' and the one thing no one at the CBC ever asked us was if they could make a profit doing this," says Stephens. "There were just some risk takers there who said 'We could be the first? Cool. Let's go'."²⁵²

Media marketing consultant Adam Froman is of two minds about the CBC's work online. On the one hand, he echoes Stephens' praise of the CBC's willingness to overlook online profit for the sake of online public service and he feels that the corporation's efforts on the Internet have surpassed those of most other Canadian content providers.

On the other, however, Froman believes the CBC has yet to fully understand and embrace the possibilities of communications in the online environment. He says that the greatest potential for the CBC to extend its brand identity on the Internet lies, not in sites filled with banner ads and tools to show off its radio and television programming, but in providing the country with useful and original content that works to fulfill its public service role. This, says Froman, means investing in online work even when it may not show a clear return in terms of audience numbers.²⁵³

²⁵² Stephens, Andrew – interview February 22, 2001

²⁵³ Froman, Adam – interview February 16, 2001

In Froman's view, the wisdom of investing in online media at the public broadcaster is not just about creating a new pipeline for CBC content, but is about creating a new tool for research about CBC audiences. He feels that there is great potential for the CBC to use its online services to gather hard data about its online users in a more accurate way than any other research it has done so far. Unlike radio and television ratings, which rely on surveys and "people meters" operated by ratings companies such as A.C. Nielsen and the Bureau of Broadcast Measurement, audience use of the Internet can be directly tracked on the CBC's own Internet server. Although the corporation relies on private research companies to help study audience attitudes and trends, Froman says that tracking the use of its Internet sites could give the corporation new insight into its audience experience.

To drive his point home, Froman uses two words: Doris Day.

In November, 2000 the CBC satirical program *This Hour Has 22 Minutes* invited its viewers to vote in an online referendum about whether Stockwell Day, then the leader of the official opposition, should change his name to Doris Day. Media coverage of the gag erupted, spilling over the Canadian border into the United States.

"As of Friday afternoon, the number of 'votes' in favor of the 'Doris Day' referendum was climbing towards 700,000 and arriving at a rate of four or five a second," Halifax journalist Steven Bonisteel told readers of the Washington Post.

“Unless the pace slows, the count will, before election day, reach a third of the head count expected to actually vote for the next government.”²⁵⁴

What bothers Froman is that, while the “Doris Day” stunt was paid for by the CBC and originated on a well-known CBC program, the actual Web site where people voted was not cbc.ca, but a site operated by Salter Street Films, the Halifax company that produces *22 Minutes*.

“There was something to learn from ‘Doris Day’ and the CBC could have learned about the people using the site, but that all took place on the Salter site, not on the CBC site,” says Froman. He argues that, by not controlling the *22 Minutes* site, the CBC wasted a valuable opportunity to study users who voted in the “Doris Day” stunt. Froman says if the CBC wants to demonstrate that it understands what can be learned from use of the Internet as a tool, it should begin by making sure that it either controls the Web sites of all of its programs or that it has guaranteed access to any data regarding users that is gathered by productions companies with which it has partnerships.²⁵⁵

Froman’s point is that, by spending most of its online resources on delivery of content and promotion, the CBC fails to use the interactive aspect of the Web to learn about both its audience and how its content may be best carried to Canadians. He says that if the CBC is to learn to use the Internet, it must see beyond the medium as a one-way pipeline to carry content from the corporation to the

²⁵⁴ Bonisteel, Steven. *Canadian Internet Voters Throw Support Behind ‘Doris Day’*. The Washington Post. November 17, 2000. [<http://www.newsbytes.com/news/00/158353.html>]

²⁵⁵ Froman, Adam – interview February 16, 2001

audience. He believes that, if the CBC would use the Internet to gain new insights into its audience, it could find a renewed confidence to be, not just a public broadcaster, but a public communicator.

What the CBC should be is a giant R and D facility to provide learning to the outside world. Let the CBC blow its brains out and see if something works. It's in a position to stay ahead of the curve and I wish the government would recognize that. When you talk about a government wanting to create a Canadian portal, I say, why do that when you have the CBC?²⁵⁶

Froman adds that the CBC, because it doesn't rely on profit to survive, has a unique role to play on the Internet in Canada, and his view that the corporation may be overlooking this role is echoed by CTV's Kirk Lapointe.

"The CBC has the best opportunity to do this as a sort of laboratory because they aren't subjected to the same commercial pressures. We should be looking to them for the greatest possible innovation and yet I don't think they're doing that and they feel rather mainstream," says Lapointe, noting that it is time for the CBC to pay more attention, not just to the online work of other mainstream media providers, but to the more adventurous experiments on the Net.

The media that appear to be succeeding (at online) the most are the ones that are playing the most. Everyone should be looking at quantity of streaming video as a path towards that because the new media user still wants to have a visual experience not a textual one. CBC's experience so far has been preponderantly a text experience – it hasn't put video first as a way of saying, "this is the dog and the rest is the tail." I know the CBC has resourced it in a strong way but I have yet to see them experiment with reporting techniques and develop new media productions.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁶ Froman, Adam – interview February 16, 2001

²⁵⁷ Lapointe, Kirk – interview January 13, 2002

Given the popularity of television, Lapointe feels that streaming video is an important part of the Web site of any broadcaster, and this is why it is a key feature of the CTV Web site. He admits, however, that it is still a challenge to determine the best vehicles for telling stories on the Net, and he believes that online media is following a pattern similar to that of television when it arrived in Canada in the 1950s.

We're still at a stage of online that television was in its very early days where everyone who had a radio show got a TV show and it took time for television to assert itself as a medium where it had its own presentation values, its own technique and its own winners and losers. Eventually, the great TV performers emerged and a style of delivery emerged, but I think we're still some distance away from that online. What we see in the interim is the migration of conventional media to the new media without a great digression of form and I think all of us know that's not its lasting impact but none of us know what it'll all become.²⁵⁸

Lapointe is not the only journalist who has an interest in Web content but who considers the online work of the CBC to be uninspiring. Wayne McPhail started Southam's *Infolab* in 1991, developed some of the first online text media sites in Canada and has worked on Internet sites such as Sympatico Lycos and CANOE. While he considers the mix of content on the CBC's main site to be one of the most unique in the country, he also feels that the principles governing the design of the site have limited its potential.

I feel it's good in terms of timeliness but that's just one aspect of the Web. I did a piece for rabble that said that making use of only timeliness on the Web was like making use of only colour on television and ignoring that fact you have both motion and sound. The main core site for the CBC still acts in terms of timeliness like radio and reads like a newspaper but I don't get a sense of anything I couldn't get in either of those mediums. There's nothing that jumps out and says, "this is cool because it's the only medium that could do this".²⁵⁹

²⁵⁸ Lapointe, Kirk – interview January 13, 2002

²⁵⁹ McPhail, Wayne – interview January 13, 2002

Just as those inside the CBC are sometimes frustrated by what they feel is the cautious nature of the corporation in dealing with news media ventures, outside observers such as Lapointe and McPhail feel that the traditions of the CBC's journalism pose a challenge to its ability in developing online media content that has unique qualities not found in radio and television. McPhail says that in treating the Internet merely as another avenue on which to display their traditional work, the CBC and other media providers such as *The Globe and Mail* ignore the potential impact that putting their content on the Internet could have on their journalistic practices. He doubts that they are prepared to expose their journalists to the kind of "bear pit"-style interaction with audience members that makes the most of a medium such as the Internet. McPhail says this is not the case with some Web sites such as rabble.ca, a new feature and commentary Web site launched by prominent left-leaning social activists such as Judy Rebbick.

Judy Macdonald, the editor of rabble, says it seems to her that message boards of sites like the Globe's are playpens the editors create so the children can talk to themselves – that they're not meant to be a place where the reporters interact with the audience, but a place for the audience to talk to itself and amuse itself. Even on cbc.ca you don't see the reporters mixing it up and to me that is tragic loss because that's what it's about – not just having the audience talk to itself but having actually being beholden to the audience and listening and sharing info and being journalistically cautious in the process. That's when it becomes really fun and really interesting.²⁶⁰

He feels this is a lesson especially applicable to the CBC.

CBC Radio isn't for the Labatt's crowd. It's a well-educated and media-savvy audience and probably slightly left of centre – similar to the demographics of rabble in some ways and open to having the same kind of discourse, and the nice

²⁶⁰ McPhail, Wayne – interview January 13, 2002

thing about rabble it's very open to right wing opinion and has number of contributors who are right wing. They (the CBC) could do that and aren't.²⁶¹

J.D. Lasica is a new media columnist with the *Online Journalism Review*

who experienced being part of the kind of journalism referred to by McPhail.

Last year I wrote a 52-week series for the parenting site *BabyCenter.com* about the birth and development of our first child, and the resulting interactivity with the readers each week was staggering: hundreds and hundreds of e-mails and forum postings from expectant mothers and new fathers, offering advice about feeding and weaning, sharing their own heartfelt experiences, and basically just wanting to have their voices heard. More than a few were surprised and grateful when I took the time to respond to their comments, as if it were somehow remarkable for a journalist to deign to climb down from Mount Olympus and interact with ordinary mortals.²⁶²

Climbing down from Mount Olympus is just what Kirk Lapointe believes could be a major journalistic challenge for the CBC. He argues that interactivity is a major strength of the Internet but is also the main factor about it that media content providers such as the CBC have yet to fully explore. Lapointe feels that the main obstacle CBC journalists face in developing the potential of online journalism is their own reluctance to see that the corporation's journalistic practices may hinder working in an interactive medium.

At the CBC, the sense of journalistic detachment is unlike anything you see elsewhere in Canadian journalism, so the sense of interactivity stops at the point where journalists are expected to mix it up with their opinions. The CBC is very skittish about seeming to have any of its people in the realm of commentators and so when the message from (CBC Television news anchor) Peter Mansbridge goes out every night to the audience, you can tell it's kind of neutralized. I think for the people who want interactivity, they also want the journalists to be a bit more of the roughhousing U.S. style of journalist – the Fox News types who will talk about

²⁶¹ McPhail, Wayne – interview January 13, 2002

²⁶² Online NewsHour. *Q&A: J.D. Lasica*. January 29, 2001.
[<http://www.well.com/~jd/idrive/online-newshour/Q&A2.htm>]

their views. At the CBC that is just not on, so it will not be easily interactive because that kind of interactivity requires that you open yourself up.²⁶³

Lapointe's observations are directed at the CBC's journalism, but others say the CBC needs to consider its online work in a much broader sense – one which emphasizes Froman's ideas of the CBC acting not just as content provider, but as a public communications facility. These people feel that the CBC's access to information and archives, combined with its brand recognition and reach across the country, give it the potential to become the country's premier online facility for education and interaction: a large-scale version of the ideals espoused by the creators of The National Capital Freenet – one that could transform the CBC from being a public broadcaster to being a public communications facility.

Debbie Lawes, an Ottawa communications analyst formerly with Decima Inc. has one suggestion.

The CBC could become an ISP (Internet service provider). The first thing you do with an ISP site is to leave it because it has no content, but the CBC is different. Could the CBC become a not-for-profit ISP? Why not? There is a whole change of thinking happening in this country about the role of public service broadcasters, so how do you do something with more interest in the public good?²⁶⁴

Former CBC president Perrin Beatty suggests yet another idea: that the CBC use its online media to review and promote Canadian computer software, much in the same way that CBC Radio and Television have promoted Canadian music and visual productions.²⁶⁵

²⁶³ Lapointe, Kirk – interview January 13, 2002

²⁶⁴ Lawes, Debbie – interview May 3, 2001

²⁶⁵ Beatty, Perrin – interview February 22, 2001

For Pierre Belanger, his goals for CBC New Media are bit more pragmatic and short term. He says that a \$2.5 million grant from the Department of Canadian Heritage will help the corporation start to digitize all of its archives and he expects the government will continue such funding for several years. From this, Belanger is hopeful that the CBC will create an online service to provide Canadians with all of its audio and video content – where it owns the rights to such content – on demand.

I'd love my kids to see shows I watched as a kid. We're so content rich at the CBC. In this day and age of globalization, we are first Canadians and the resources we have with our archives and the Web treatment of that to develop Canadian perspective is fantastic. We're the encyclopedia of Canada and we need to add to it on a daily basis.²⁶⁶

As much as people such as Belanger, Lapointe and McPhail differ in the vantage point from which they view the CBC, they share a desire for the corporation to broaden the way it views the Internet and take greater risks in the way it develops sites such as cbc.ca. Text, radio and television stories, they say, already are available from existing media. Schedules, host biographies and digital photography are interesting features, they note, but hardly stretch the current role of the CBC.

What these people outside the CBC advocate is that the corporation reconsider its role in online services and look to become the "R and D" facility suggested earlier by Adam Froman. Such thinking could require a debate about the role of the CBC's online media, but it's a debate that these people feel could prompt new ideas for the public corporation.

²⁶⁶ Belanger, Pierre – interview January 14, 2002

PART 11 – PEER-TO-PEERING A STEP AHEAD: NEW INTERACTIVE WAYS OF THINKING ABOUT THE CBC'S ROLE ONLINE

In mid-1999, Shawn Fanning, an 18 year-old dropout from Northeastern University in Boston, devised a computer program that would allow computer users on the Internet to trade music encoded in MP3, a software format used to compress recordings into small and portable data files. By December of that year, several major record companies had filed lawsuits against Fanning and *Napster*, the company that grew from his creation. By the summer of 2001, *Napster* was, for all intents and purposes, shut down.²⁶⁷

When examining the history of online media, the story of *Napster* might seem to have little in common with that of the CBC. It is, however, worth considering because of what it demonstrates about a practice that is unique to the Internet: peer-to-peer file sharing. If the CBC wants to consider future ways to serve the Canadian public, the lessons of *Napster* and similar Internet systems could help to provide ideas of online practises that might move the corporation from its role as a public broadcaster to that of a public communications facilitator.

Napster's impact on computer networking was huge, especially among younger users. Six months after its debut, *Napster* accounted for about 40 per cent of Internet traffic at schools such as the University of Southern California.²⁶⁸ By the spring of 2001, the University of Toronto found that servers for some of the

²⁶⁷ Barbrook, Richard. *How the music industry blew it*. Nov. 30, 2001. Salon. [http://www.salon.com/tech/books/2001/11/30/sonic_boom/]

²⁶⁸ Oakes, Chris. *Time for a Napster Rest?* Wired. February 10, 2000. [<http://www.wired.com/news/technology/0,1282,34201,00.html>]

university's residences – hotbeds of *Napster* use – were transferring more data than the university's entire library system.²⁶⁹ Reports of traffic on *Napster* varied, but *Business Week* estimated its monthly file trades in the tens of millions²⁷⁰ and from his position of watching the Net for Industry Canada, Andrew Stephens estimates that, in early 2001, *Napster* was accounting for more traffic than any single site on the World Wide Web.²⁷¹

What users of *Napster* wanted, of course, was free music. However, what they also wanted, says Stephens, was control over the content they sought and the ability to get it from individuals rather than corporations. In short, next to e-mail – the most popular activity on the Internet – *Napster* might have been the best example yet of an application that demonstrated the power and popularity of the interactive experience of the online medium.

“The thing that’s exciting to me and people like me is the peer-to-peer stuff,” says Stephens. “Like it or not, *Napster* gave people what they wanted.”²⁷²

Napster was important because it demonstrated the popularity of what is known as peer-to-peer file sharing – an exchange of data between single computer users which is facilitated by a service such as *Napster* but which actually connects

²⁶⁹ Rolston, Bruce. *Limits on internet overuse pay off: Measures lower impact of Napsterites on other users.* News@UofT. February 18, 2002.
[<http://www.newsandevents.utoronto.ca/bin2/010418b.asp>]

²⁷⁰ Black, Jane and Salkever, Alex. *Online Music: The Tempo Quickens.* *Business Week*. May 22, 2001.
[http://www.businessweek.com/bwdaily/dnflash/may2001/nf20010522_934.htm]

²⁷¹ Stephens, Andrew – interview February 22, 2001

²⁷² Stephens, Andrew – interview February 22, 2001

the users to each other, not a major server. This is in contrast to the one-way downloading functions that tend to dominate the servers of major media providers such as the CBC. For those interested in online marketing, the *Napster* episode created a lot of hype, but given that major players in the global entertainment industry (such as Bertelsmann AG, Sony, EMI, Warner Bros. and Universal) felt it worth the legal fees to attack the company in court, it showed that some media heavyweights understood the potential impact of Fanning's creation.

"*Napster* was much more than just a means of sharing music," said Michael O'Neil of the online consulting firm IDC Canada. "*Napster* was the first expression of how peer-to-peer networking enables communities of customers to exchange value and information, and change the structure of an entire industry."²⁷³

Journalist Richard Barbrook feels that it helped to refocus attention on the origins of the Internet.

One of the main reasons why the Net was invented in the first place was to allow file-sharing between computers in different locations. More than 30 years later, this concept is at the center of another wave of technological innovation: peer-to-peer computing. Contemporary developers are enabling computers, mobile phones, game consoles and all sorts of other devices to interact with each other. Everything linked with everything. Everyone swapping files with everyone.²⁷⁴

As demonstrated by the students at the University of Toronto, *Napster* knew no national borders. Communications analysts David Ellis and Duncan McKie told their clients that *Napster* had let the file-sharing Genie out of the Internet bottle and that the best reaction would be to adjust to the new online environment.

²⁷³ Macaluso, Nora. *Report: Businesses Must Embrace Web's P2P Trend*. Newsfactor Network. [<http://www.newsfactor.com/perl/story/12466.html>]

²⁷⁴ Barbrook, Richard. Op.Cit.

Even if the entrenched content owners prevail in court over *Napster* and its ilk, however, the victory will be temporary – and probably not even in the best interests of those who feel most threatened by file-sharing software. Filing motions is okay; copyright lawyers have to eat too. Working on new, more realistic revenue models, like try-before-you-buy music, would be even better.²⁷⁵

Both Ellis and Andrew Patrick note another significant impact of *Napster*: its influence on the adoption of broadband or high-speed Internet lines by home subscribers. Although he lacks the hard data to prove it, Patrick believes that “*Napster* never would have happened without high-speed residential access and high speed residential access wouldn’t have been as popular without a service like *Napster*.”²⁷⁶ Ellis agrees, and says research he conducted last year on Canadian Internet service providers showed that about one-quarter of Canadian homes had subscribed to high-speed Internet by the middle of 2001, a figure expected to climb to one-third by this year and over half of Canadian Internet subscribers by 2005. He says this is partly due to the falling price of high-speed Internet service in Canada, but also because of the popularity of peer-to-peer file sharing as an online activity.²⁷⁷

As the National Broadband Advisory Taskforce has pointed out, greater access to broadband is expected to change the kind of content Canadian Internet user seek for providers,²⁷⁸ and while the CBC currently avoids most technically-

²⁷⁵ Ellis, David. and McKie, Duncan. *New Media Perspectives 2000*.
[<http://www.omnia.ca/content/NMP2000-ToC.pdf>]

²⁷⁶ Patrick, Andrew – interview April 30, 2001

²⁷⁷ Ellis, David – interview May 11, 2001

complex features that would make its main Web pages inaccessible to those without high speed, services such as Radio 3 are designing content specifically aimed at the growing high-speed market.²⁷⁹

Apart from the need to consider the impact of increased broadband Internet access, it might have been possible for those with any influence on new media at the CBC to think they had little to learn from the *Napster* episode. However, this may not be the case, for even with *Napster*'s free services shut down, peer-to-peer use has continued at a steady level on several other music Web sites and is stimulating new computer network uses that could have broader social impacts than just on the swapping of music files.²⁸⁰

One example of this emerged in January of this year when Intel and Microsoft joined with The National Foundation for Cancer Research (NFCR) and other health and computer organizations to announce a peer-to-peer project to help scientists develop a treatment for the anthrax toxin. One way to consider the idea is to think of the method of fighting fires with a bucket brigade: in this case, by downloading a special screensaver from Intel and leaving their computers online, users will be able to join a peer-to-peer network of thousands of computers whose

²⁷⁸ National Broadband Task Force. *Report of the National Broadband Task Force*. Executive Summary. [http://broadband.gc.ca/Broadband-document/english/table_content.htm]

²⁷⁹ Ouimet, Robert – interview December 16, 2001

²⁸⁰ Barbrook, Richard. *How the music industry blew it*. Nov. 30, 2001. Salon. [http://www.salon.com/tech/books/2001/11/30/sonic_boom/]

unused resources will be linked to help build a virtual supercomputer capable of analyzing molecules for anthrax researchers.²⁸¹

People such as Internet journalist Wayne McPhail suggest the CBC should learn from such examples of broader peer-to-peer use and that the corporation could take its contacts in the journalistic and cultural communities and, rather than remaining a provider of content, become a facilitator of online interactive learning. Using peer-to-peer principles, he suggests an example that uses the music technology known as MIDI (Musical Instrument Digital Interface), computer software that allows someone playing an electronic musical instrument to remotely trigger sounds from other electronic instruments.

Suppose CBC created some software that you hook up a MIDI keyboard to your computer and would allow you to get MIDI data from somewhere else. Then you create a CBC MIDI chat room and have a master class in jazz with Diana Krall. She could play people's keyboards or she says, "there's something I did, now James in Newfoundland, why not give it a try?" There's an example where you could say "we can't do this on radio, but we can online, so go check it out." It's like *Napster* – something you couldn't do in any other way.²⁸²

If it weren't for the rapid evolution of the Internet in just one decade, the notion of the CBC getting involved in any sort of peer-to-peer operations might seem like science fiction. However, among the majority of people interviewed for this paper, peer-to-peer file sharing was the one Internet application that they felt showed the most potential for growth in the long-term.

²⁸¹ United Devices Inc. *Science and Computing Leaders Ask the Global Community to Join Forces to Fight Anthrax: Peer-to-Peer Technology to Accelerate Time to a Cure*. Austin, Texas, United Devices Inc. Jan. 22, 2002. [http://www.ud.com/company/press/press_releases/01222002.htm]

²⁸² McPhail, Wayne – interview January 13, 2002

Admittedly, the implications of the CBC minding any sort of grass roots interactive operation could be staggering enough to make even an Internet enthusiast such as Perrin Beatty doubt its possibilities. To begin with, the corporation would have to study the legal implications of taking on such a role and how the country's copyright laws might apply to file trading on any sort of CBC peer-to-peer operation. John Lewis and Pierre Belanger both say that just establishing copyright rules for the distribution of its own material over the Internet is possibly the most complicated administrative matter the CBC currently faces in dealing with online communications.²⁸³ Ken Wolff even paints a picture of how peer-to-peer file sharing could cause problems for the journalistic content produced by the CBC.

I think peer-to-peer is interesting but I have concerns about it. What if *The Fifth Estate* did a piece and someone took it and copied it and altered a few of the clips so it said something different than what was intended and then they shared it around the world. The CBC could find out (about the altered report) and issue a statement about it, but by then the damage would be done.²⁸⁴

Apart from issues of content and copyright, there also could be potential questions about why the broadcaster might involve itself in an activity that could not be seen as related to broadcasting and why such a service could not be started by other bodies such as The National Library of Canada or the Department of Canadian Heritage. Also possible could be a political furor over the CBC spending public funds on an activity possibly best left to the private sector.

Obviously, there would be technical factors to deal with, although one advantage of peer-to-peer networking would be that it could be routed outside of

²⁸³ Lewis, John – interview January 12, 2001

²⁸⁴ Wolff, Ken – interview March 7, 2002

the CBC and thus avoid the bandwidth charges that people such as Bob Kerr think could create serious financial problems for the corporation in the future.

Finally, the corporation likely would have to discuss new possibilities for partnerships with other media companies to help bear the cost and logistics that such a plan might require. Rather than considering only private sector partners, the CBC might also have to consider alliances with public bodies or non-profit groups, the kind of action that people such as Adam Froman say could challenge the traditional control the CBC has exercised over its own operations.

The perception of the CBC is that they produce programs because that is what they want to do. The CBC has a "let's go build it" mentality, while private broadcasters say let's see the business model, but the CBC is in an enviable position because there is no downside if it doesn't work out. The CBC has this opportunity to lead everybody and then, because it is a government organization, it can share the knowledge with the rest of the world.²⁸⁵

Froman says he understands the potential pitfalls of the CBC undertaking such a new interactive role, but he argues that it is too easy to discount the notion because it pushes the CBC's role on the Internet well beyond Rabinovitch's desire to stress what he terms "content convergence" – something the CBC President defined in a speech last spring.

Content convergence, on the other hand, is the formatting and use of content, aided by the flexibility afforded by digitalization, to present the same information, stories, etc., on different platforms and in different ways. It is often referred to as re-purposing the same information. This allows us to speak to audiences on platforms relevant to them. CBC/Radio-Canada is firmly positioned in the world of content convergence. Why? Because our expertise is creativity, and our emphasis is on enhancing and furthering our primary role and ability as a

²⁸⁵ Froman, Adam – interview February 16, 2001

content creator and provider. We provide content on the platform and in the form that best suits our audience.²⁸⁶

Peer-to-peer networking could challenge this definition of the CBC's "primary role and ability as a content creator and provider," and could move the corporation into a new role of a communications facility that might help it to return to its origins of public service. Given the politics that have traditionally involved Canada's public broadcaster, the greatest challenge to such a change might not be about technology or legal issues, but about whether the CBC and the Canadian government could envision the corporation taking on a new role as online educator, library, data trader and community bulletin board.

Maybe the idea of the CBC becoming a sort of *Napster*-like file trading service of Canadian news, culture and learning is too far-fetched, too complicated, too expensive or too littered with political trip wires for the CBC to even consider it. Maybe it would dilute the CBC's brand so much that it would leave the corporation lacking an identity among, what Paul Stainton calls "this whole sea of stuff out there."²⁸⁷ What senior officers in the corporation should not ignore, however, is the potential that interactive activities such as peer-to-peer could have on the Internet as compared to using online media as a way to reformat content and drive users back to its radio and television operations. It is a lesson that the CBC should have learned four decades ago when its producers discovered that creating

²⁸⁶ Rabinovitch, Robert. "Convergence: Is it a big Deal?" speech to the Canadian Media Director's Council Annual Conference. Toronto. April 3, 2001. [<http://cbc.radio-canada.ca/htmen/239.htm>]

²⁸⁷ Stainton, Paul – interview February 15, 2001

content for television was more than just a matter of taking radio scripts and adding pictures.

Even if it doesn't branch out as a facilitator of peer-to-peer activities, new media at the CBC needs to consider reaching beyond its current dominant role to extend the brand of other media. People such as Andrew Stephens suggest the CBC online services could use interactivity to play a unique part in the creation of entertainment and information. For example, he suggests that when the CBC holds one of its "Town Hall" programs to discuss a major social issue, it could go beyond using the Internet to get comments from CBC audience members and use its online abilities to stream information and research back to individuals and groups who have registered that they are interested in receiving information about the topic discussed in the forum.²⁸⁸

Wayne McPhail has a related idea for the corporation: creating an investigative reporting Web and television show in which community members network together and help to contribute ideas and leads for stories and where, before it is all assembled into a final production, they help to review the material being considered for the show. To use a high technology cliché, McPhail feels that the CBC needs to think outside of the box, viewing its online work for its own possibilities of public service rather than as way to communicate news and publicity.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁸ Stephens, Andrew – interview February 22, 2001

²⁸⁹ McPhail, Wayne – interview January 13, 2002

At cbc.ca, this also is a vision of Ken Wolff. While he hasn't yet worked out details of how to apply peer-to-peer file trading to the CBC, Wolff says he dreams of taking CBC journalism to an interactive level that gets beyond the traditional idea of online media being a one-way pipeline of information.

I have this vision of sending a reporter in communities, establishing a Web site and opening it up to the community and getting people to have discussions. The role of the journalist would be to say what is the most interesting thing that people are saying, but we go there and say "here's your spot to share with each other." Then you can link similar stories in similar communities. Can you imagine how the CBC, if it did that, could affect people's lives? We'd be doing what we were supposed to do. That is why this changes the notion of how we get our stories.²⁹⁰

The ideas of people such as McPhail and Wolff go beyond examining the CBC's role as a content provider and raise questions about the role it plays in Canada. Media institutions do not just tell stories, but can be players themselves in the communities they cover – this could be though a newspaper columnists taking on a particular social cause or a local television anchors acting as master of ceremonies for a charity telethon.

For the CBC, the community has not been local as much as it has been national – Canada's public broadcaster has portrayed Canada as the street where it lived and acted as a citizen. Some Canadians have, in return, embraced this view of the corporation, and when they put "Save the CBC" signs on their front lawns four years ago, it was not just to support the stories and information they received from the public broadcaster, but was to trumpet the feeling of a country they received from the CBC and the on-air personalities that it presented them. If online media at the CBC wants to appeal to Canadians as much as famous CBC broadcasters such

²⁹⁰ Wolff, Ken – interview February 16, 2001

as Mr. Dressup or Peter Gzowski, it might begin by helping to link people together in smaller communities through interactivity.

While it might seem distant from the current-day practices of the CBC, the experience of *Napster* demonstrated that the Internet does have some unique applications, and that those on it are interested in putting these applications to use. The question for Internet content providers such as the CBC may be how much they are willing to adapt their online operations in order to capitalize on this interest.

PART 12 – A FINAL ASSESSMENT

As was stated at the outset, no one interviewed for this paper felt that the CBC has produced anything less than respected and professional online content and the corporation has numbers that appear to demonstrate its popularity. Ken Wolff says that, despite concerns about competition from other Canadian media online operations, cbc.ca has held its own, registering 660,000 unique visitors (a count of users who actually move through the site and consume its contents as opposed to those who register only a single page view) in January 2002 as compared to 617,000 unique viewers for globeandmail.com and 878,000 for Canada.com (the site operated by CanWest Global).²⁹¹

However, people who observe the evolution of the Internet, such as Andrew Stephens, hope that the CBC can rediscover, in its online operations, the same level of innovation that helped the CBC in its early years of new media. While he is pleased with the CBC's past experience in expanding onto the Internet, Stephens says it may be time for the corporation to be ready to experiment online again in the way it did in 1993. He accepts that such efforts may again start in a small way, but that they must challenge the view the corporation has of its service to Canadians.

All it takes is a mind shift to say, "look, we're going to start looking at segmented markets and we're not going to be just the big public broadcaster. We're going to hive off a small development unit that's going to look for new market spaces and how we handle information as a tool and say okay, we're not just a Canadian broadcaster, we're an information provider." The thing is, we don't know what the models are until we try them.²⁹²

²⁹¹ Wolff, Ken – interview March 7, 2002

²⁹² Stephens, Andrew – interview February 22, 2001

This is not to say the corporation hasn't demonstrated any such initiative already online. It has created numerous message boards, online chats and Web pages aimed at providing people with useful information – information that is more than just a marketing tool for programs on CBC Radio and Television.

A challenge for the corporation, however, is to consider that some media content might stand up as uniquely applicable to only the Internet. Such thinking would require a shift of thinking at the CBC to one that accepts that the Internet can be a unique medium and not simply another platform on which to replay or build on the content produced for the corporation's television and radio services. This is what could come from a new and inspired vision for online communications at the CBC and why this paper has attempted to explain the reasons behind the lack of such a vision in comparison to the CBC's past development of radio and television.

Responsibility for this lack of vision does not rest solely with the CBC's president, board of directors or particular staff members, for the CBC is also affected by the public policy that moulds its mandate. That mandate, explained in the 1991 Broadcasting Act, says the CBC must "be predominantly and distinctively Canadian", "reflect Canada and its regions to national and regional audiences", "actively contribute to the flow and exchange of cultural expression," "contribute to shared national consciousness and identity" and "be made available throughout Canada".²⁹³ Nothing in its mandate, however, says that the CBC must limit its

²⁹³ Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. *Mandate*.
[http://cbc.radio-canada.ca/htmen/1_2.htm]

activities to broadcasting, nor does it preclude the corporation from expanding its public service role.

When those in government who influenced both public broadcasting and online communication in Canada – certain federal departments, regulators such as the CRTC and special reviews such as IHAC or the Broadband Advisory Task Force – started to adapt to the evolution of the Internet, they focused at first on its infrastructure, partly because they viewed it as the first building block of the information highway and partly because they wanted to interest private enterprise in bearing the costs of these “pipelines.”

In contrast to the expansionist view of public broadcasting that the Canadian government held during the eras when CBC Radio and Television developed, the public policy view of the corporation in the 1990s has focused largely on its role as a broadcaster and has paid little attention to the potential of expanding its work to include a wider role as a major Canadian portal, Internet service provider or online service public institution. The reduced perception of the CBC’s role as a key protector of Canadian culture has been demonstrated by the fact that government policy makers have made few public statements indicating support for the CBC taking a lead role in the development of online content in Canada.

This is not surprising, since it appears that few senior people at the CBC itself have seriously discussed such a possibility. Most senior managers appear to have been too preoccupied with stabilizing radio and television operations to consider how new media could be anything more than a new platform on which to extend the interests of older media.

To be fair, however, ideas for new media have evolved in the CBC over the past eight years. What started as a handful of slow-loading sounds files grew into modest computer bulletin boards, attempts to raise revenue, one of the country's leading online news services and tools to expand the material presented by CBC's radio and television services.

With the exception of Radio 3, however, the CBC's online content has been largely driven by the older media services – a practice that looks as if it will continue at the corporation. Radio 3, although supported by some senior managers, appears to be seen mostly as a place to develop content for young people rather than a research facility that could alter the traditional practices of the rest of corporation's new media operations in the future. Questioning those traditions – both in terms of their commitment to interactivity and their ability to allow for Web journalists to operate differently than their colleagues in radio and television – could be a necessary step for online journalism at the CBC to move ahead.

Ultimately though, the uneven development of online communications at the CBC must be seen partly as a result of the leadership of the corporation. Other than Perrin Beatty's decision move to increase funding for new media – a move that was both idealistic in its support for online media and pragmatic in its hope for the revenue that new media might generate – there appear to be few examples of CBC managers who felt that they have had the time, resources or corporate support to suggest the development of online content that might not be designed to aid CBC's radio or television programs.

Given the tight fiscal climate of the corporation over the past decade, this is not surprising. The 1990s were years of retrenchment and settlement – not expansion – for the CBC, and new media operations in the corporation have faced a climate of “right place, wrong time.”

The caution of the CBC regarding the Internet, however, is not solely a result of tight money. New media has arrived at a point in the CBC’s history that is different from previous eras, and the CBC’s past role – in fact, the role of the entire public policy system – in “protecting” Canadians from American media content, is under question by many of those who influence media regulation – people such as David McKendry of the CRTC.

We’re entering an era of young Canadians saying, “I can go anywhere I want on the Internet, so why aren’t you letting me watch MTV.” There’s a generation coming along that does not look at (Canadian content) things as opportunities rather than as threats, but I’m not sure they’re going to be less Canadian. It could mean a revolution in the role of the CRTC – the commission was founded on the idea that we could control what people got and when they got it. Soon the individual is going to determine the future and that’s where the regulation will be.²⁹⁴

McKendry feels this could be good for the CBC in the long run – that less regulation of Canadian media over content could allow the CBC to be the only showcase for Canadian content. As this paper has argued, however, a key question for the CBC New Media is not whether it will serve and attract users as much as whether its content will be an attraction itself or simply a means to market other CBC services. So far, the corporation has yet to give a clear answer to that

²⁹⁴ McKendry, David – interview February 23, 2001

question, although its actions indicate that new media's future – and possibly its funding – will remain directly tied to the future of its radio and television services.

The first indication of any change in this future might be signalled by the appointment of a senior manager dedicated solely to new media, for the lack of such a leader leaves the service's future tied directly to the goals and the budgets of the CBC's other media operations. It also means that the journalistic practices of the CBC's New Media will remain tied to those of radio and television, seldom allowing for the kind of interactive journalism that people such as Kirk Lapointe and Wayne McPhail feel may be needed if CBC is to expand its interactive journalism and take advantage of the unique interactive potential of the Internet.

These are substantial matters for those interested in new media at the CBC to consider. They are not issues that Andrew Patrick expected to develop when he helped to put the CBC online, since he doubted that the Internet would become a medium for major media providers.

I'm not surprised by the popularity of the Net over the years, but my thoughts were more grandiose. I expected more amateur productions where five guys get together and decided to do a radio station and naively I thought there was a demand for that and that there wouldn't be a demand for the same old stuff coming out in a different way. There was nothing that we put on the site that you couldn't get from CBC. All we did was to time-shift it.²⁹⁵

While Patrick and others see current online content as the "same old stuff," this is not to say that in another decade or two that the Internet will be used in the same way as it has been during its relatively short life. It is worth remembering that the arrival of both television and the transistor turned radio in both Canada and the United States from being a cross-country medium that was piped into people's

²⁹⁵ Patrick, Andrew – interview April 30, 2001

homes to a largely local medium whose uniqueness is largely because of its portability.

Television also has changed from its early days, developing from a time when a few main networks carried entertainment, news and sports to one where the a medium has become an offering of niche services that provide dozens of specialized channels to viewers. In 1989, CBC producer Mark Starowicz argued that there was an even more important aspect of this change for journalism: that television was replacing radio as the medium to which people turned when they sought immediate and reliable information about the events of their world.

Systematically, the TV set becomes more relevant to people's lives than the radio. It has become the principal source of entertainment, of news, and of service information such as the weather. At a certain point, unless radio programmers undertake a fundamental re-examination of the role of radio and regain lost territory, becoming more relevant to daily life, then I fear people will increasingly turn away from the radio instrument itself.²⁹⁶

Radio has not yet died, and if the lessons of media history teach us anything, it is that the arrival of a new medium does not replace old ones, but adds selection to which media consumers can turn. Applied to the Internet, this allows us to see that its current form and use is likely to change as numerous other factors change in the future.

There are various possibilities for the future of new media: it could merge with television to allow viewers even greater control of the timing and content of the programming they watch; the development of wireless transmission could turn the computer into a competitor with the radio, allowing listeners to access audio

²⁹⁶ Starowicz, Mark. *Radio in the Face of Television*. Address to the Third Annual Conference on Radio News and Current Affairs EBU-NAMBA. Washington, D.C. Oct. 30, 1989. p. 2

content from well beyond their local area; technical developments in online networks and computer hardware could reduce the cost of online access and make new media accessible and usable by the groups that have been the least likely to embrace it – the less affluent and the elderly.

Fundamental to all of these developments, however, is the principle of interactivity – the ability of online users to interact with and even to influence the content they find on the Internet. Adapting to this “push and pull” form of media could be the greatest challenge for “push” institutions such as the CBC, whose efforts have focused more on providing Canadian content than on being participants in their communities. That is why this paper argues that the CBC eventually will have to look further at what interactivity means to its role in the Canadian community. While interactivity can take place in different ways, technologies such as peer-to-peer file sharing and real-time online messaging services (such as ICQ and MSN) may present the CBC with both the greatest opportunities and the greatest challenges to build on the interactivity of its online work.

The key here is not that the CBC should see itself only as a content provider, but as a Canadian communications and learning facility – a facility whose brand is one of a trusted service of high standards that attempts to reach all Canadians. This notion of the CBC as a national information exchange – as opposed to news and entertainment provider – isn’t new for the CBC: in the 1940s, CBC Radio featured programs such as “School of the Air,” as well as broadcasts of

home making advice and farm news advice.²⁹⁷ It might be worth considering that new media is demonstrating that the CBC's future might not lie just in being a public broadcaster, but in being a broader public service.

This would mean that, rather than looking just to other broadcasters for answers about its future, the CBC might look to other public institutions that are attempting to define their role in new media. Wayne McPhail cites an example from which the CBC might learn: the Ontario Science Centre and its internal debates over whether its new media mandate should be to market the centre or to get online users involved in science.

It's looking at what it can be on the Web and the CBC could learn from this because the science centre is still wrestling with basic questions. Many at the centre feel that the visceral science experience is in going to the Science Centre and so the marketing view there is that online just gets people in the door. But what about just giving people a good online experience in and of itself? That's kind of like what the CBC has to ask.²⁹⁸

Again, this raises questions that go beyond just the CBC's online operations and which involve a deeper examination of the mandate of the corporation.

To be fair, the CBC is not unique in treating new media as an extension of its other media services. In Australia, the ABC's plans to develop broadband content focus largely on developing TV-like services such as video on demand rather than suggesting a unique role for online services.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁷ Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. *The CBC: A Perspective*, vol. 1-3. *Submission to the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission in Support of Applications for the Renewal of Licences*. 1978. p. 70

²⁹⁸ McPhail, Wayne – interview January 13, 2002

²⁹⁹ Australian Broadcasting Corporation. *The Outlook for Public Broadcasting, is it Bright or Bleak?* transcript of Radio National. October 12, 2000. [<http://www.abc.net.au/rn/talks/8.30/mediarpt/stories/s198700.htm>]

In Britain, Bill Thompson, who writes a column about new media for the BBC, says a recent government report about media regulation and ownership was telling in what it left out.

The introduction gave the first clue that I might be disappointed. It begins 'the question of who owns our newspapers, television and radio is vital to democracy,' and goes on to talk about 'a rapidly changing technological and economic environment,' but it does not mention the Net at all. The Internet, we are told, has 'become a significant new medium' but nothing in the proposals indicates that anyone really believes this or sees just how much the Net has already changed the shape of our media landscape.³⁰⁰

At the CBC, new media producer Robert Ouimet believes that the way the public broadcaster views the future of new media will be based largely on how its television operations relate to it. "Until they see the Internet as challenging their medium in terms of story telling or whatever, I don't think they'll take it seriously," he says. "Unless TV takes it seriously I don't think the corporation will take it seriously."³⁰¹

Despite some cynicism on his part about how the CBC has dealt with its online operations, Ouimet does believe that the arrival of the Internet at the CBC has taught some people at the corporation a lesson in how the CBC adapts to change and to new developments in media.

³⁰⁰ Thompson, Bill. *Isn't the Web a Medium Yet? Bill Thompson despairs of this Government ever really understanding the Net*. BBC Online.2001. [<http://www.bbc.co.uk/Webwise/column/col121.shtml>]

³⁰¹ Ouimet, Robert – interview December 16, 2001

There is a lesson to be learned about the CBC in the way it's done things online. It's that there is a great deal of value in small groups of foragers who try stuff. What the Internet allowed us to do was to try stuff without anyone taking a risk because it was almost invisible. If we could do that more with our airtime, we could be moving forward more rapidly with developing new stuff. The problem is that we've stopped and that shows are on air for 10 or 15 years and there's no change.³⁰²

The CBC's ability to adapt to change is at the heart of questions about its vision for online communications because, after a history of displaying Canadians to each other, the CBC may have to focus more on connecting Canadians to each other. This could be a challenge for the corporation: the history of the CBC shows that some radio broadcasters were reluctant to accept television as a unique medium in the same way that some television producers may wonder about the uniqueness of online media.

At the same time, the potential changes posed by new media haven't been articulated in any grand vision and have grown with a fraction of the resources the corporation puts into other services. While the "Save the CBC" movements of the 1990s provided a chance for both the corporation and Canadians to discuss the CBC's role in this country, they focused on CBC Television and Radio. Maybe some equally-passionate discussion about the future of the CBC's Internet operations could help provide, not only a more focused view of the CBC's treatment of online media, but a look at how well the corporation is adapting to the changes and challenges of the Canadian media environment at the start of the new millennium.

³⁰² Ouimet, Robert – interview December 16, 2001

Given the rapid growth of the Internet in the past decade, this kind of discussion might give the corporation a new reason to exist, not just as a public broadcaster, but as a public communications utility on an information highway that does not run just one-way. The CBC's move to the Internet may never prompt the same kind of broadcasting lore generated by celebrated radio and television programs such as *Morningside* or *This Hour Has Seven Days*, but it may have the potential to help the corporation to serve Canadians with a new sense of purpose.

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