



Take Action! Public-Private Partnerships: Brian Hocker and Edward McCain

Dodging the Memory Hole II | May 11, 2015 | Charlotte Mecklenburg Public Library

EDWARD MCCAIN: [\[00:08\]](#) We have a fairly large group, and we're going to break up the group and continue some of the work that was done on partnerships in the first Dodging the Memory Hole last November. But since we had Brian here today I thought we'd explore a little bit more about his public / private partnership stuff.

You touched on some of your ideas at the end of your talk, and I thought we could explore those a little bit more about what, in particular, a news organization like yours, as a broadcaster, what kind of value we might be able to add to that equation. One of the things I'm thinking about in the survey that we did at RJI, we asked – now this was newspapers, but I'm assuming there may be some similarities here – what's the value of your archive to the quality of your journalism product? In other words, being able to go back and look at what's been done or what exactly happened five years ago, ten years ago, what does that add to the value of your product?

BRIAN HOCKER: [\[01:35\]](#) OK, so, I'll make this observation about that. Just recently for us the ability to access previous videotape shot, or digital, has become available. Heretofore it was photographers and reporters with a desk drawer of cassette videotapes.

MCCAIN: And maybe separately, right? Two different tracks, maybe? The video over here and the reporter's notes and everything or whatever they've written.

HOCKER: Absolutely. Right. It was reporter's recall working with their photographer or whatever photographer they were assigned to that day, saying, "remember when we shot this?" and, some of us are – well, maybe in this crowd it's not like all of us – but most of us don't have the indexing or organization skills. So it's just wherever it may be and some reporters are better at that than others. And it was really pulling things out of drawers like that. So that's evolved, and I'll also bring up – what was your question specifically?

MCCAIN: So what value do these assets have if you can access them? If you can't access them they're not very valuable. They're paperweights, right?

HOCKER: [03:03] You're going to pick up that I just kind of think this way. So how I would position that is, today, in Dallas-Fort Worth, there are four owned and operated network stations doing news. We all do a pretty good job at that. We are a parity; the stations are always trying to break out to get more viewership to your station. So what's a way to differentiate that?

And to me, one way to differentiate that is to be able to go back and get context of the stories of today with the stories of the past. And that would be a major selling point to me – you know, as was mentioned earlier, Texas has a very strong Texas Association of Broadcasters it's a very strong trade organization in Texas amongst broadcasters. I honestly don't know what the press association is in Texas, how that's set up. My point being that – and again, we got accessibility to those log books I was telling you about because UNT digitized them. It's amazing for us to just be able to go and search what we can now.

MCCAIN: [04:23] So the reason that you can now do that is that you have a system, a computerized system, that contains all of that for you.

HOCKER: The reason we can do it is because the University of North Texas has it.

MCCAIN: I'm thinking about also your digital, but now with your digital-born digital stuff that you capture digitally it's going into a system and –

HOCKER: It's Grass Valley Stratus for any of you who might know that system. It's a Grass Valley Stratus system.

MCCAIN: It's a media asset management system.

HOCKER: We've hired established positions we call media managers. I call them thinking IT people, if you will.

MCCAIN: I love it! Sorry. *[laughter]*

HOCKER: It's kind of a hired position where they have to demonstrate to us they have a sense of news and importance and things like this and can keep things straight on the server.

MCCAIN: If it didn't rile up the IT people I would take that label and spread it around but...

HOCKER: [They're] IT people with a news sense.

MCCAIN: IT people may not have been specialized in the idea of creating value from information which is – that's basically one of the things you're in business to do.

HOCKER: [05:44] And they have a high degree of interaction with reporters, with the editorial people. That's the other thing that distinguishes them.

MCCAIN: So those are new positions?

HOCKER: Those are new positions with this asset management system that we have in place. We created those positions.

MCCAIN: The background story, the backstory, would those be broadcast or would they be online?

HOCKER: Well, they'd be both. We're moving increasingly towards online. We have eight people at the station dedicated to our online product but then, as an extension of that, there is a small New York staff and we call upon the other ten known stations to contribute from the other markets. So that's all available to our site.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Do your reporters find themselves having to retrain somewhat to take into account that they now have archival material at their disposal when creating stories? Is that a learning curve or is that something that some are having to kind of bring into their skill set that wasn't there before?

HOCKER: [07:05] I see that, and I understand that I'm not strictly on the editorial side, I mean I'm not on the editorial side, but with working with the systems and with news management I think – again, to my point we have recorders of all different types and some of them understand the value of going back and getting context and knowing.

And I'll tell you it was interesting – so, when we had the videotape that we were donating to the University of North Texas, there was, “well you can't do that, it's going to be thirty miles away and it's not going to be digitized immediately. How am I going to get that?” So I said, “OK, let's think about this.” And over a period of time I tracked how frequently reporters went back and pulled videotape. And I approached the chief editor and I said, “we're just going to set this up, and show me.” And what they showed me was you really don't need this videotape too close. [laughter]

And I worked into the agreement how we can retrieve it. But I said, “all right, it's going to leave at such and such a date, bring me the stuff that you need digitized, that you know you need digitized”. And it was fascinating. Some reporters brought me a whole box of small cassette – I just lost the format name – but the format of the small cassettes. Others brought me a handful. That's kind of the different thinking there in terms of reporters and I digitized all that stuff. And I said “all right, so now that's in our system. You've got that.” And that's how we did that.

And I also hired some former producers, and we actually went back and looked at top stories through the decades with both local newspapers – the Dallas Morning News and the Star-Telegram – and they ferreted out that material of our videotape and we digitized that up front before it went to UNT. I don't know if I'm answering questions...

MCCAIN: [09:16] Maybe I should preface this – I wanted to jump right into this with Brian, with the idea that my concept of approaching people in partnerships is that I want to come to them with

something that I can offer. If I go to them with the attitude of what can you give me, that may not be a successful approach in my experience. Maybe we have some people that are very generous, but, what is it that we as memory institutions or digital preservationists, what are the things that we can offer – I'm assuming most of us from the public side but it works for private, too, that you have to have an offering you have to have a valued proposition that addresses some need that the other person or other company has.

So that's why I'm trying to explore this with Brian, like, what is your pain? Let me know. Where does this hurt? And is there a way that information science or the stuff that we've learned can help you relieve that pain or maybe even bring you some happiness. Make your life easier. Make your product better.

HOCKER: [10:43] I don't ask for happiness, just relieving pain is enough. [laughter] It generally creates some happiness. And that's what I was trying to get at really in my presentation: What is the value proposition for those people that you want to approach? There was a gentleman he was – he has just walked into the room – he said to me, “you want to know the reason we don't knock on your door? It's because we're scared of you.” [laughter] I didn't take that personally. I'm not sure, though; I didn't give him an opportunity to expand upon that.

MCCAIN: But you also had some apprehension going to this academic institution and I'm thinking, why?

HOCKER: Well, it's what you don't know. I mean, NBC said to me, “don't give up the copyright” and I'm like, the game's over. What am I going to do? But, it's what you don't know that you fear.

MCCAIN: You also told me that during this process, when you were considering where should these archives go, that – I don't remember the exact wording but I think you said that UNT had an appropriate level of assertiveness, that their approach was successful because they didn't give up.

HOCKER: They didn't give up. They brought me in and, again, it's a simple thing but you see them digitizing – and I'm a map guy, I love maps – you see them digitizing nineteenth century Texas maps, and you're saying, “wow, they obviously value this stuff; they have the technology to do this and understand the precision necessary,” if you will. They can handle our scripts and that was tangible. They took me in there and they showed me that they didn't just talk about it. Other folks were like, “oh yes we knew that.”

MCCAIN: And how did that happen? How did you get there?

HOCKER: Initially I got there because they had an event celebrating the millionth newspaper page that they digitized for the portal.

MCCAIN: And you got invited?

HOCKER: [13:10] I got invited. It was just in the library, a reception; it was quite informal. Martin [Halbert] spoke, and then they gave tours of the library to small groups.

MCCAIN: I think Jim just disappeared, but – there's a very interesting backstory about the Denver Public Library and how that connection was made between the Denver Public Library and the Rocky Mountain News. If he comes back [he'll tell you], otherwise I'll tell you what it is but it's better if he tells us.

So, in terms of the value proposition – well the first point here was that you had contact with people from UNT. And you reached out to them?

HOCKER: No. So I got to them through the executive director of the Amon Carter Foundation. It was, in my theory – in my thought it was Mr. Carter's material that we had in our basement. It would be appropriate for me to say something to the foundation that we were getting ready to do something with this. And that foundation had funded programs at the UNT Library. So he said, "I think you ought to talk to the UNT library."

And I'll tell you, interestingly he has very close ties with TCU. TCU, which is a major academic institution here in Fort Worth, Dallas-Fort Worth. And I would have totally expected him to say, you got to take this over to TCU or what have you, and I brought up TCU, and he said, for whatever reason he said, "I just feel good about this UNT project that they're doing with the portal." And that's how we got there. I talked to TCU.

MCCAIN: But there was some comfort level you had by that endorsement?

HOCKER: [15:02] Yeah. And when I say appropriately aggressive is a term I use, I mean they just – UNT stayed on the project, and every time I spoke with them they brought back a little more. They were clearly looking at, what's Brian's situation? We're building a new building at the same time, a seventy-five thousand square foot building and thinking about moving everybody there and bringing in new content management systems and things like this, so there was a lot on our plate. And they were aware of that. They kept bringing solutions.

MCCAIN: Would you have been interested if – this is a theoretical, so, hypothetical question – would you have been interested in using a library five years before this or before this move was on your radar? I'm just thinking – sometimes you can't do it just one time. You have to be out there making touch with people so that when their time is right you're there.

HOCKER: [16:15] So it is also partly the type of person in your background.

And I didn't mention this but I actually started in the business in newspaper. I was hired in high school by the Patriot News Company in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. And I'm a news junkie at heart. That's my background. So, for what it's worth, I'll shed this light on you: So I wrote a column as a high schooler for the Patriot News Company, it was called "Carriers in the News." This was a thing they had, it was

back when kids threw newspapers, so I went on their birthday, you know things like this for Carrier context. So all those get archived, I find out, in the Pennsylvania State Library which is this huge, monolithic really cool looking building. So I take my daughter back there a number of years ago with the idea that I'm going to show her what dad did. She was not too impressed *[laughter]* but I was really impressed that I could find my column with a little picture on it in that library. So I've always been big on libraries and preserving things like that.

MCCAIN: So it's a combination of the right person, the right time the right opportunity.

HOCKER: Yeah, that's part of it but there are others out there. I'm telling you, you can solve a problem for people you can solve a problem for broadcasters and news gathering.

MCCAIN: **[17:27]** What should we be doing to reach out to broadcasters? Also I want to touch on, I don't know if there's a firm line but there's a fair amount of stratification between the newspapers, radio, television. And you guys kind of stick together you have your own channels of communication. And so information doesn't necessarily get shared back and forth. When do you think that's going to change?

AUDIENCE MEMBER 2: How many people are aware of the problem? How many people are just aware of it but they're ostriches? How many people, broadly, – I mean I'm sort of asking you to represent journalism across North America and that's not fair, but I mean – what situation would we be going into?

HOCKER: I think people are very focused now on new content management systems and the value of preserving today for tomorrow. I think that's high on the agenda. Looking back at the film in the basement I think is more difficult. There's fewer of us, when you really have to ferret that out. I keep saying you can solve a problem for us – it's not necessarily the whole problem; it's not the film, digitization to online available for everybody. It's certain problems.

AUDIENCE MEMBER 2: **[19:20]** It depends which problem we want to solve. I think that's really the issue, not trying to sell every one of the problems.

HOCKER: It's true. To me the small problem was, again, digitizing the log books. So that they're searchable. So I can at least know what tape to call for at UNT. That's kind of a small problem. Like I said, I envisioned a high schooler at the FedEx store down the street doing this, not UN– not university archives or not a university librarian with this grant.

MCCAIN: You needed access from your collection and you needed that done in a trustworthy way, that you felt comfortable with.

HOCKER: Right. Absolutely.

MCCAIN: It could be that there's a bunch of different things, and what we need to do is reach out

and find out what other needs are out there.

HOCKER: To your question initially, I started as a newspaper guy and I love newspapers, I just really have followed them all along. I made a conscious decision – I actually got sidetracked in business, I was working at the oil and gas business and got a master's degree and wanted to get back into news somehow – and for whatever reason at that time I looked at both businesses and I said to myself: This broadcasting is really a good business. The model, the margins and things like that and that's why I got into that, I've always been kind of on the business side. And now newspapers tend to look down upon local television, saying, "well I hate television." Not just local.

MCCAIN: But you did work in newspaper so you've elevated your position, I think.

HOCKER: That's what I tried to do before I went into this.

MCCAIN: I'm teasing, I'm teasing.

HOCKER: [\[21:09\]](#) No that exists. One of the great moments to me in the past couple of years – so I have relationships with newspaper reporters in Dallas-Fort Worth, Star Telegram, the Dallas Morning News, the Fort Worth Business Press and the Dallas Business Journal, and I talk to them regularly. I get a call – no, I was making a call I was trying to get some coverage for something we were doing. And I'm talking to him and this reporter says to me, "Brian, can you send me some video of that?" He says, "you know, people really like to see moving pictures with this stuff." And I'm like, "yeah! That's the whole deal." So he was looking for video for the website, for his story, and he was asking me if I can send him video. That was a huge "aha" moment for me, it's like, well maybe they're finally getting it on the newspaper side.

MCCAIN: Maybe. Well, thank you, I think we're going to now review some of the work done. Thanks, Brian.

HOCKER: Thank you. *[applause]*

MCCAIN: I told Brian it's really great to have people that are working in the industry, the content creators of journalistic organizations who need to hear, I think, more. We need to make sure those people are invited and that we listen to what they have to say.