

**Public Media Innovation Fund
Round One**

Final Report/March, 2008

Grantee: WNYC Radio
Project Name: Search the Candidates' Audio Record

Contact person:

Howard Parnell, Executive Director of Digital Media
Amy Busam, Senior Development Officer, Institutional Giving



Introduction

As previously described, Bill Swersey, WNYC's former Director of Digital Media, and Lisa Samson, a consultant hired through the project, selected archival audio material of Hillary Clinton and Rudy Giuliani that was meant to capture a range of issues about which these two Presidential candidates (at the time) had spoken to the New York public.

During this "test" phase, Lisa created, as proposed, an off-line "working database of keywords and audio samples for potential inclusion in live candidate index." This database, which was built in Excel, included 47 digitized audio files. She imported them into the system designed by Everyzing, our vendor, and our interactive department. In preparation for the public launch, WNYC's interactive department designed a landing page for the audio search site on wnyc.org, which was delivered to Joan Rubel as documentation on December 3 and 7, 2007. The proposed "completion and test of beta [audio file] index on wnyc.org" was conducted and delivered to Joan Rubel in December 2007. Before the service and site publicly launched, however, we experienced a change in leadership of the project, which resulted in a shift in the direction, focus, and management of the project.

Technologically, the project had already been successful. Yet, under the project's new leadership, it was felt that the 47 files that had been chosen and digitized together did not create a comprehensive, contextual, or particularly useful selection of content. Recognizing the time and effort necessary to convert these 47 files alone from analog to digital (approx. 100 hours), it was decided that, without the sufficient time or comprehensive editorial lens available to direct the selection and conversion of archival material going forward, it would not be feasible at this point, organizationally, to continue to focus on the archives. This choice was made purely from a time management perspective, and was not meant to detract from the value of the original project or the need to make WNYC's archival and analog material available. We shifted our focus from archival material to new content (and content from within the past two years), which was both timely and, currently, more practical.

"Audio Search" launched on February 28, 2008 on www.wnyc.org in the most coveted area on WNYC's website – the upper right-hand corner. While the original idea of "unlocking" our institutional archives using speech to text technology is not entirely off the table, it is clearly a longer-term project that would require a more comprehensive plan for execution and a significant contribution of time and effort that was not possible during this period. WNYC has

implemented a “podcast” approach in which Everyzing is able to download podcasts of data, throughout the day directly from the wnyc.org. Content, drawn from WNYC shows *The Brian Lehrer Show*, *On the Media*, *The Leonard Lopate Show*, and *Soundcheck*, and from the WNYC newsroom, becomes available only a few hours after the initial airing.

Information is continually being gathered by WNYC’s interactive department about the different possibilities and functions of speech to text program (i.e. Everyzing’s ability to create topic pages and “topic cloud,” which groups the most searched upon terms in any given period of time, based on topics we define, such as the “Presidential Election.”) Resulting topic pages would be accessible to search engines such as Google or Yahoo. We are currently looking into integrating these and perhaps other applications, or integrating the search capability into the program architecture of our other programs. Further, in becoming a 21st century media organization, we are developing and actualizing a multiplatform, rather than a simply “value-added,” approach to developing and promoting digital and interactive content, of which the audio search is a part.

Promotion

Promoting the audio search service was inevitably delayed by the shift of the project focus and the timing of when the search was launched. We have promoted audio search via *The Brian Lehrer Show*, one of our most popular programs with over 350,000 listeners per week, on April 16, 2008, and our weekly newsletter, “This Week on WNYC,” during the week of April 21, 2008. The newsletter is weekly distributed to 50,000 of local, national, and international members, listeners, and subscribers. Following the original description of the project, the newsletter may include shorter references to the service that direct readers to the audio search capability on wnyc.org. We also hope to have additional placement on one or more of *Brian Lehrer Shows* during the next few weeks.

The circumstances of the delay in promotion were largely out of both the interactive department and development’s control. The newsletter is subject to an editorial review that determines the priorities of the week. The editor, who has been trying to get the audio search included for a while, has been subject to other priorities, including our move to new operating headquarters across town; the launch of a brand new national morning radio program, *The Takeaway with John Hockenberry and Adaora Udoji*; a new identity campaign and logo; a new host of one of our main music programs; the primaries and upcoming election; and timely events, among other things. In terms of any on-air promotion, the Eliot Spitzer scandal and elections alone made it difficult to get the attention of the newsroom and show producers.

Hypothesis

In terms of qualitative research, as stated in our proposal and grant agreement, WNYC undertook the project with the following hypothesis in mind:

The ability of an easily searchable online resource of searchable audio will be a clear benefit to WNYC journalists, researchers, and the general public, as evidenced by increasing use of web-based content. It will strengthen WNYC reporting and analysis; it will stimulate interest from other journalists and the public.

Quantitative Measures

Everyzing has been tracking quantitative measures for WNYC. Everyzing uses Urchin Web Analytics, which is a product of Google, to measure web traffic on WNYC and Everyzing's co-branded pages. The tracked period currently available is from the launch of the audio search on February 27 through April 4, 2008. In that time, the audio search garnered a total of 55,600 page views and approximately 18,500 "sessions," defined as "series of hits to the site over a specific period of time by one visitor." The number of average sessions per day was approximately 486. Because of the delay in the launch of the service and also the change in focus, these have been the primary measures used so far to measure traffic and use of the site. As we gain more experience of the service and publicize it more to the public, we hope to implement additional quantitative measures, including monitoring of linking and other evidence of external referrals, the number of requests for information; and any demand for additional archived material. We will also track what kind of feedback we receive from users, including comments posted about specific coverage or content. We were not able to "develop an online audience poll to solicit demographic information about project users and to assess impact of the searchable archive" but we did collect qualitative information from reporters and laypeople to ascertain usability, accessibility and convenience.

Qualitative Measures

Once the service launched on February 28 on wnyc.org, we began to organize small groups of individuals to serve as "testers" of the service. These included one group of several members of our newsroom (including a member of the Brian Lehrer Show) and the other group included both radio and non-public radio listeners. In terms of methodology, we engaged a total of 10 users (5 journalists—all in-house—and 5 non-journalists, including a public radio listener, a non-public radio listener, a member of our listener services department, a colleague at a classical music station in Southern California, and a member of the development department staff). We designed and posed the following questionnaire, which looked at the project through two general lenses—User Interface and Value—posed according to whom we were speaking:

1. General

- Do you listen to WNYC?
- If so, do you ever go to the website for more information about a story, guest, etc?

2. About the service:

- Do you know what the term "audio search" means and what it could be used for?
- Have you ever encountered an "audio search" function on a website before?
- Have you had the opportunity to use it? If so, on what site and in what capacity?
- Did you know that the service was available on wnyc.org?

3. User interface:

- There are two search functions on wnyc.org. Can you find them? Can you tell what the difference is between them?
- What does the appearance of the service suggest? Is it intimidating?
- Search "Sean Bell" How easy was it for you to find and listen to the audio?
- Could you find the full transcript? Was it helpful? Could you use this in your work?
- What would you do to make the site/service more user-friendly?
- Was it clear from the instructions that clicking on words in the transcript brings you to specific audio content in the segment?

4. Testing Hypothesis:

- Does the service offer a clear benefit for journalism/public radio?
- Would/Could it save you time?
- Who do you think the target user/audience of this service should be?
- Do you think other journalists find this service useful? The general public? Researchers?
- For journalists: will this be a beneficial asset for you? How would you use it?
- For the public: would knowing this service existed increase your interest in WNYC? In the local news? In other WNYC online content?

User Interface

One of the primary lessons learned from the focus groups is that the user interface may be one of the key determinants of success, for both journalists and laypeople. One of our primary challenges was designing a web presence for the Audio Search that would not conflict with the general wnyc.org “search” function currently available. We learned that the audio search box needs to be more clearly identified or defined and has already been mistaken as the website’s general search function. Most testers would not have known what “Audio Search” meant had it not been pointed out to them and at one point, one of the testers intended “to search WNYC dot org and mistakenly used the audio search function instead.” Testers suggested providing a short description about the difference between both services (a one-line description or even a roll over link to a description) or one that suggested how the public might use the service, such as “Heard something on WNYC but not sure where, or on which show? Just type in the subject, or a phrase you heard and we’ll find the audio for you.”

In terms of the Everyzing interface, we would probably instruct any other station looking to get involved with the technology that it is still an emerging field, and that they would need to be flexible with the applications that are currently available from providers and perhaps even invest in developing their own software or code. After contracting with Everyzing, the company changed its user interface, shifting its primary focus to video content. After researching the services of other speech to text providers, such as Critical Mention, Everyzing then released an update to the speech to text service featuring a much improved user interface and overall improvements to site design and functionality, which answered most (but not all) of our original questions customization and usability. Testers in both groups, however, did not find the Everyzing presentation entirely user-friendly or intuitive. Some testers felt that the Audio Search FAQ expected the user to already be familiar with the service and several testers did not realize that clicking on words in the transcript would bring them to specific audio content in the segment or that the transcript was scrollable.

While we are retaining Everyzing as our provider for the near future, as the technology improves and other providers emerge, we will evaluate our contract with the company as necessary. Using information gathered from the testing phase, we will make recommendations to the interactive department regarding the improvement of the overall look and usability of the Audio Search function.

Value

In terms of value, the answers from our testers varied. For the journalists, one of the most valuable aspects of the Audio Search function was the speed and ease with which the audio could be searched. For example, one tester had already used the service in her work on one of WNYC’s daily programs. She wrote “Amazing....you have just cut down our production time

massively. We needed a clip from an interview last week but we didn't know where it happened in the 35 min. We tried the audio search and voila....we were good to go." Most of the journalists also felt that the service would be even more useful if they could also key word search on outside content, such as programming from NPR, or if the material could actually be downloaded or podcast for future use.

In terms of the general public, the non-journalist testers saw value in providing such a service to the public. While one tester thought it would be useful for fundraisers, another thought that, because the service was so easy to use, it could be a quick and efficient way to involve listeners/users in the process of delivering online content. He thought it would be useful for and appeal to anyone who is interested in public media, society, culture at large, and civic engagement. Further, all of our testers felt that WNYC was on the leading edge of public broadcasting by testing and implementing this technology. As one person commented "I think this functionality will be commonplace in the near future (it was less than two years ago when Rupert Murdoch, I believe, bought YouTube for billions of dollars, and most of us couldn't see the reasoning—now YouTube is ubiquitous with video search), and therefore believe that anyone using the internet who is interested in the content will make use of it. This functionality goes way beyond journalists, students, researchers, or even public radio listeners for that matter."

Summation

Based on comments and feedback, we are very confident that the service will be beneficial for journalists and researchers, and would recommend that stations begin to consider integrating audio search into their offerings. Most non-journalist comments were favorable but the actual benefit to the general public remains to be seen. Knowing that additional methods, such as Audio Search, were available on wnyc.org for deepening the content and stories that one tester heard on WNYC and elsewhere made her more likely to turn to the station for content. Yet this tester is also a public radio listener, and so is certainly more prone to turn to WNYC than the casual news consumer. While we continue to see the service as a tool that can help engage listeners and new audiences in our content and public broadcasting, offering an improved user interface and training, and implementing greater publicity efforts may be necessary to reach and engage a critical mass of listeners, journalists, and general audiences.