

Are You In or Out, Seattle?

My internship experience with King Broadcasting's
Digital Media department in Seattle Washington.

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This summer I was lucky enough to find a scholarship in Seattle Washington that proved to be a mix of technology and business experience. King Broadcasting isn't the first company that springs to mind when the city of Seattle is mentioned. With major players like Amazon and Microsoft founded and based here, King seems to blend into the background. King is a sleeping giant, purchased last year by GANNETT and recently reorganized in July under their digital branch, TEGNA, there is no shortage of innovation and development.

My job at King5 sounded simple back in May. Under the direction of Ray Heacox, President of King Broadcasting, and guidance of Mark Briggs, Director of Digital Media at King, the goal was to research, design, and build a product to reach a younger generation. "*The Children of Uber...*" Mark called them in our first meeting. The generation of on-demand everything would benefit from King's content and have a better grasp of what's going on in their city. Step one, before I even thought about touching the 30 years of content, would be to survey a group from the target demographic about their lifestyle and interests. The data would be collected and analyzed. We'd arrange follow up interviews to find out more about their interests based on their survey responses. Once we'd completed the interviews, we'd have an affinity mapping session. Once complete we'd begin developing an outline of what the product would need to offer in order to meet the needs of the target demographic. We would then develop a prototype, pitch the prototype to the President of Broadcasting, determine how much content of was available to load into the product, organize it, and write a work flow process and business plan.... all

in 6 weeks. Oh, and Mark wanted me to act as the project manager for the whole thing... Did I say simple?

My specific objectives were to:

1. **Evaluate roughly 29 years of media/data and develop a process to streamline its sorting as well as establishing contents' geo-locations.**

As stated above, before I could touch the content, I needed to better understand what content the product needed. The only way to do this was to ask people we wanted to watch King's content, what content they were willing to watch. I took the first week of my internship to devise a survey to provoke thoughtful responses and a few laughs. The [survey](#) asked questions regarding the following categories:

- Cooking
- Outdoor Activities
- Health and Fitness
- Sustainability and Green Living
- Nightlife
- Music and Concerts
- Festivals and Local Events
- Fashion
- Shopping
- Technology
- Decorating
- DIY and Home Improvement

I figured my best bet was to engage the audience was to peak their interest as to the product I was working on, and more importantly, have them be honest in their responses over of aspirational. This is the problem with surveys... people answer in a more aspirational way than they do an honest, real way. That being the case, the follow up phone calls were very valuable. By starting out the call with, "*tell us what you did this weekend after you left work on Friday...*" we were able to get a more accurate picture of what each person's life was like. When they said they "went out to dinner" we followed up with *where, how'd you pick that restaurant, how was it* and noted the methods people used to find out where good places and things to do were.

There was a common thread in the interviews, and it wasn't what we were expecting: Seattleites have a fear of commitment and hate making plans. People were more likely to use the term "around" instead of "at":

"I'll be around Barnes and Noble down town around 7 if you want to get together for dinner/drinks..."

Our newly transplanted Seattleites were in the habit of making plans to meet at Barnes and Noble at 7pm and then go to a specific restaurant for dinner at 730, and more than likely would have a reservation.

Mark suggested I create what he called a "where are we now" [doc](#) to serve the purpose of catching up anyone who would come on to the project and bring them up to speed on where we are, what we'd done so far, etc. Drafting this document became critical. It really helped me understand what the data meant to the process, as without it no further development could take place. Until this point in my career, I'd been brought in after this phase of work had been completed. I became acutely aware of the reality that I was actually shaping a product. I was not just doing the grunt work to produce a product someone else thought up. Mark referred to this feeling and experience as **Blue Sky**,

"This is the fun part, the Blue Sky thinking, it's before we come back down to earth."

He was right.

It was around this time two other King employees joined the project, Gary Love (Manager of Emerging Products for TEGNA) and Dawn Boughton (Digital Producer for Evening and Manager of Strategy for Digital Media). Mark told the

three of us that he wanted me to take a more active role in the management of this project and I would be the point of contact during my time at King. It was a pleasant surprise and a lot of responsibility. My expectation had been to learn more about project management, but not assume the role of project manager. I swallowed my panic and took the data we collected from the surveys and phone interviews and wrote what I dubbed *Lifestyle Resumes* of the people we'd spoken to. The lifestyle resume served as a quick and snap shot of each person and bullet pointed what they said they were looking for in a lifestyle product and why. The four of us met the next day and started what Mark had referred to as affinity mapping. We took the categories previously mentioned and put them up on a whiteboard. We then went through the lifestyle resume of each person and wrote down our thoughts on post its. We then took the collection of post-its and tried to group them with their corresponding ideas.



What we ultimately found was something pretty cool. From the surveys and phone interviews we were continuously told everyone wanted a calendar, and event list, a database, *something* to tell them everything that was happening in order for them to

pick what to do with their time. They wanted to know they weren't going to miss out on something, option B, by picking option A. The more we listened, the more post-its we stuck to the wall, the clearer it became that everyone we had spoken to wanted a curated list of experiences they should consider... not a list of everything under the sun. They wanted to feel validated and no matter what choice it was, it was a good one.

I took what we found and updated the What We Know Now document and made playful [summary](#) for Mark, Gary, and Dawn. As I could feel the amount of research beginning to wear on me, I knew wasn't the only one. I prepared for our check-in with Ray and Jim Rose (Vice President of Broadcasting). The meeting went very well, our work was well received. Both Ray and Jim were interested in seeing a prototype, hearing more about the database of content, revenue versus cost projections, and a business model. I was ready for the first two and thankfully Mark said the last two were his arena and we'd go over that together.

Later that day Mark and I met, and we agreed on the need for a high level content assessment. Before we could move forward on any database discussions, we needed to know what would be going into it. The focus would emphasize how much we have of each asset, plus how much we can expect each year going forward. The assessment needed to manage segments, not shows, and needed to fit into the categories in some way to show us where the holes were. I began construction on what would later become known as the [Content Table](#), but started as the *Assessment* page.

I attempted to set up meetings with each producer of the King assets we planned to leverage and found a phenomenon: people had outlook but didn't use their calendars. Their calendars were completely **blank** in most cases. My emails and meeting requests went both unanswered and ignored. I received a short, curt message about how they were busy and didn't know why I wanted a meeting. This afforded me a great opportunity to start walking around the building and meeting people face to face. I started knocking on doors and introducing myself.

"Hi are you Joan? Hi Joan, I'm Jamie! I'm working for Mark Briggs to develop an on-demand product for lifestyle content and he told me you were the person to talk to about Evening Magazine. We want to get your stuff in front of more people. Do you have a minute to chat about what kind of content you'll be producing or can schedule something?"

Amazingly, to get a producer to like and make time for you, you simply have to say, "I want to put your stuff in front of a bigger audience, when can we meet?" Producers will lineup to talk to you, they will prepare you reports, and give you ideas on who else you should talk to. I made a point to send a thank you note to each of them (via email) and CC Mark to address two things: thanking the producer for their time, insights, and institutional memory; as well as to keep Mark in the loop of who I'd met with. Needless to say my plan worked, I went from being the annoying email to the guy bringing them a Starbucks who was going to make their life better. I took notes in these meetings and started formulating examples for the prototype mockups I'd be creating next.

2. Document a working process of converting the multiple types of data into useable, contiguous form

This was something I'll admit I was worried about completing by the end of my internship. However, my prayers were answered very shortly after I started by the CFO of King, Sheldon Lee. In an impromptu meeting with Sheldon, Mark and I learned as King Broadcasting was moving its entire operation to a new building in early 2016, TEGNA had agreed to digitize **all** of King's content to prevent the need to move and recreate the tape vault (a 3600 square foot region of the current building's basement) in the new space. A company in St. Louis had been contracted to convert the tape to digital data. I was relieved to say the least, as this change did leave me more time to spend on the product prototype development. I still had to go through the content and organize it in some way before I left King, so the team would know what it had to work with going forward. This was not a glamorous process, and consisted of me watching tapes, searching King5's website, and a lot of Googling. The Content Table grew and changed as I found more and more content. Eventually I decided to use Data Validation, to ensure consistency for sorting and searching. I found roughly 900 pieces of useable, digital content to fit the categories and sub categories we'd generated. Our estimate was 2000 pieces would be needed to launch a beta, and our stored content could give us about 50% of what we needed. It felt good to be so close to the estimates, especially since it was a week of staring at a screen searching Google, spending time in a dusty tape vault, and ultimately sitting in a booth watching special "half inch" and "three quarter" tapes that won't play in a normal VCR.



3. **Develop and rough out several options as to the design of the project: both mobile application and possible OTT (Over The Top: Roku, AppleTV, etc.) application**

We were tasked by Mark to work as a team to create what we thought would best embody what we'd discovered so far through our research. I built an interactive slide show in Google docs that when in presentation mode would emulate an [OTT](#) experience. While I worked on that, Gary designed a mobile app and [website](#) for engaging users to get up and go do things around Seattle. The prototypes were a hit

and helped us see what kinds of content we would need to find, and also create from scratch.

4. **Track my progress and document my experiences throughout the project, what worked what didn't**
5. **Meet with team on weekly basis to discuss progress, receive constructive feedback, and establish goals for the coming week**

Both learning objectives 4 and 5 blended together more than I expected during my time at King5. I met with Mark essentially everyday, though the meetings were more fluid than scheduled. As the director of all things digital at a broadcast organization, his calendar was often very full. Our offices were very close so our meetings often consisted of him walking by and popping in anywhere from once to several times a day. I did my best to notate our meetings and summarize when we met weekly as a team. Gary contributed to this effort; he would often summarize his thoughts and insights from a development perspective after our weekly team meetings and send me a copy. These insights proved invaluable when making decisions on how to proceed in research and development. As far as what didn't work, that's more difficult to pin down. I have on the job experience managing a project, so I came in with a solid understanding of the steps we needed. When something didn't go exactly as expected, it was more of an opportunity to tweak what we were doing instead of throwing it out and starting from scratch. I've put a few examples of the work I've done during my time at King in a Notebook on

2015 Summer Internship

EverNote. EverNote was a very popular tool used by pretty much everyone I came in contact with at King, it's simple interface and sharing ability made it a valuable tool.