



Not for Profit? The *Voice of San Diego* Experiment Epilogue

Voice of San Diego began 2010 with an operating surplus of about \$20,000, having brought in its highest-ever revenues of over \$960,000 in 2009—representing revenue growth of nearly 15 percent over the year before, though it was just shy of the goal of around \$1 million that CEO Scott Lewis had set for the organization. Ad revenues and corporate sponsorships for 2009 dipped slightly, down some \$10,000 to \$69,257. But advised funds such as the San Diego Foundation made up for it, contributing over \$500,000—over half of *Voice's* revenue—to the site. Membership donations totaling \$55,269 accounted for around five percent of revenues.

A new revenue stream was also gathering strength in late 2009 and early 2010. *Voice* reporters frequently appeared on the local NBC station to discuss their stories. In early 2010, the station found a sponsor to pay *Voice* to produce short television segments three times a week. On Tuesdays, either CEO Lewis or Executive Editor Andrew Donohue co-hosted “San Diego Explained,” together with an NBC news anchor. On Wednesdays, VOSD quality-of-life reporter Kelly Bennett hosted “Survival in San Diego.” On Fridays, Lewis and Donohue hosted a segment called “Fact-Check,” in which they investigated selected remarks from public officials for accuracy. By April, this plus VOSD’s affiliations with other local media had added up to thousands in revenue.

On the expense side, the lion’s share of the budget—close to 70 percent—remained devoted to editorial. Thanks largely to a grant from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, *Voice* had been able to expand the editorial budget by over \$100,000. In fall 2009, they created a new position: a yearlong investigative fellowship for a recent college graduate. The editorial expansion had concrete results. The website, voiceofsandiego.org, was able to produce special projects reporting, for example, on gaps in San Diego’s safety net and flaws in the teacher placement system in San Diego public schools. Traffic to the site also continued to grow. From an earlier high of 80,000 monthly unique visitors in 2008, VOSD in January 2010 attracted over 120,000 unique visitors.

This Epilogue was written by Kathleen Gilsinan for the Knight Case Studies Initiative, Columbia Graduate School of Journalism. The faculty sponsor was Assistant Professor Duy Linh Tu. Funding was provided by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation (05/2010).