Overview

This project would provide *The Terminal*, community news website based in Birmingham, AL, with as many as two (2) traveling new media newsrooms. It would provide an opportunity for the website to conduct outreach programs encouraging more people to engage with media outlets, regardless of affiliation to the project, digitally.

Some of those tools and methods would be reviewed and taught to the general public, providing a way for not just The Terminal but all area online outlets in metro Birmingham to gain additional visitors.

Reasons for project

The Terminal is named for the long demolished terminal train station in downtown Birmingham, AL. The reason that the name was chosen was because of the idea of providing a place to share various bits of information about the city of Birmingham that would make it easier to have on and offline discussions about issues affecting it. The idea was to change the way people look at the word "terminal" and the city of Birmingham. There is a similar connotation with the word "bus" in Birmingham that we think can also be addressed by demonstrating what it can bring into a community while also expanding the level of engagement and involvement in issues.

This would give us the ability to find additional voices that exist in Birmingham, AL and provide them with the tools to share their story with the rest of the community. The buses would allow us to take an aggressive approach with a revamping of our site's editorial section, *Dear Birmingham*, allowing us to find those voices and allow them to be heard on major issues affecting the city, including municipal elections and controversial proposed developments where they live and at larger social gatherings (i.e., large festivals, sporting events, etc.). It would also help us identify new contributors for The Terminal allowing us to fill gaps.

Project description

We would ideally want to restore two older buses to carry out this project. We would use the sides of the buses for display advertising (with the hope of demonstrating digital display options), serving as one potential revenue stream to cover the long-term costs of operating the vehicles. The digital displays would allow the buses to serve as news tickers wherever they were parked. A regular rotation of locations would be worked out with city and transit authority officials exposing the buses and the information being displayed to several areas.

The buses would have their interiors redesigned to allow for workstations and mobile audio/video studios while allowing for visitors to learn more about the news gathering process and the ever expanding collection of digital tools used for this purpose.

This project would help raise the awareness of the website by providing it with a permanent, mobile workspace.

They would be equipped to provide wireless access to those located close to the buses the ability to log on from wherever they were parked. The buses would allow for members of the city's digital community to use their knowledge about digital communications tools but enable us to extend the brand. It would also give us an chance to learn directly from those visiting about the types of pieces that they would like covered while enabling us to be able to cover a larger portion of the city in a much more efficient manner.

While there are several organizations that currently use mobile facilities to collect stories and information from the community (i.e., StoryCorps), we have not been able to find one that also tries to reach out and explain this world of new media to those that may be interested in participating in a way that would benefit all.

Resources available for project

The connections and alliances established with community leaders during The Terminal's formative years puts us in a unique position to realistically implement this project. It is our belief that in order to truly live up to our tag line of being "Birmingham's hub" and develop a fully sustainable business model, we must reach out to and identify areas of the community that we could do a better job of covering. This initiative, aided by the experience of our managing editor of an economic development professional specializing in community building, is something that we believe gives us our best shot at achieving our goals.

Potential concepts demonstrated

The digital newsstand concept was introduced locally by the managing editor of The Birmingham News, Scott Walker. There is no reason why it is not feasible to attach digital displays on either side of the bus in the former advertising spaces to allow for headlines from various media outlets to appear in a scroll format. While Birmingham does not necessarily have the current ridership levels to properly demonstrate the full potential of using digital advertising displays, the buses while parked could allow for QR codes to be shown with the headline. This would give those operating the newsroom a chance to explain how that technology works and encouraging folks to dig deeper about issues that affect them.

The interior of the buses would not necessarily be designed for permanent installation of computers, with the space being flexible enough for several different types of data inputs to be used, including laptops and tablets. This would keep the buses from becoming "dated" too soon in the process.

Additional educational opportunities

Classes could be offered ranging from a basic understanding of RSS to how to set up your own digital outpost – whether it be a blog, social networking profile, etc.

One potential way to reduce the overall cost of operating the system would be by making alterations to the engines to allow for them to operate on used cooking oil.

If the project was deemed to no longer be an effective method of doing outreach and conducting on-site crowd sourcing, the buses could be turned over to a local institution to be used as part of their continuing efforts while still providing exposure to new technologies. Potential recipients in Birmingham, AL include the Birmingham Public Library Archives department (providing an opportunity to collect historical images via scanning and audio/video recordings) and the University of Alabama at Birmingham (possibly allowing them to expand an already successful oral history project undertaken earlier this decade).

Basis for funding request

The numbers used for this initial submission ($500,000 over three years) are based on estimates for the initial cost of acquiring and restoring two (2) older buses, restoring their engines, converting their interiors to accommodate the work spaces and the various computers that would be on board and to secure a location to park the buses. As of the time of the final deadline for phase 1, the cost of overall maintenance and other incidental costs had not be confirmed.

Additional potential funding sources

This grant proposal serves as one potential source of funding for the project. While we have long been committed to forming a for-profit entity to manage the growth of The Terminal as it shifts to becoming a collector of stories, we are willing to investigate filing as a 501(c)3 in order to be able to move forward with this project. We will also be making a request to the greater Birmingham community and other foundations both locally and nationally in an effort to move this project forward.