

Fisher Communications recently launched 44 hyperlocal Web sites in the Seattle market and plans to launch another 20 to 30 sites in that area this month.



# HYPERLOCAL NEWS

Neighborhood content adds depth to TV newsrooms.

BY ANGELA SNELL

It's no secret that this year's global economic meltdown has affected TV advertising sales, while production costs have soared. In the meantime, media companies are pressured to provide consumers with news that's relevant and in a format they can consume on their own time. If the content doesn't match viewers' needs, a broadcaster will lose them.

Additionally, what little money advertisers do have to spend, they expect to use on targeted ads that reach the right demographic of viewers. This situation has created a perfect storm for local TV broadcasters, but there may be a solution. Fisher Communications and DataSphere think

they have a home run, and it's called hyperlocal news.

## What is hyperlocal news?

In mid-August, the local Seattle TV station KOMO-TV launched 44 neighborhood Web sites that support the news station's main site. The neighborhood, or hyperlocal, sites offer viewers specialized local news content, as well unique opportunities for advertisers. From a content standpoint, the station restructured its newsroom in how it captures and posts content. On the technology side, it teamed with DataSphere, which provides its LocalNet ad sales force and technology engine.

"We think the hyperlocal drive is where our industry is going," says Troy McGuire, vice president interactive and news, Fisher Communications. "To be able to drive people to their neighborhood news, along with the big stories of the day, that's a very powerful way to deliver content."

At the home page [www.komonews.com](http://www.komonews.com), visitors can customize the news content they receive through a widget, which allows them to select a specific neighborhood. For example, if a user selects the Ballard neighborhood, he or she will receive news about Ballard in the righthand corner of the home page. Clicking on the link to "Ballard News" or "More Ballard News" will

bring them to *ballard.komonews.com* — a hyperlocal site devoted entirely to Ballard neighborhood news. Not only do visitors receive specialized news on the KOMO home page, but they can also use the individual neighborhood hyperlocal site to find out more about what's happening in their area, such as news, events, restaurant openings and sports activities.

The home page enables visitors to customize news by refining it down until they find the content they're looking for. For example, a search for "sports" can be refined by sports team, city, county, news staff and type of sport. The technology is intuitive; it suggests additional similar stories or videos based on the content currently being viewed.

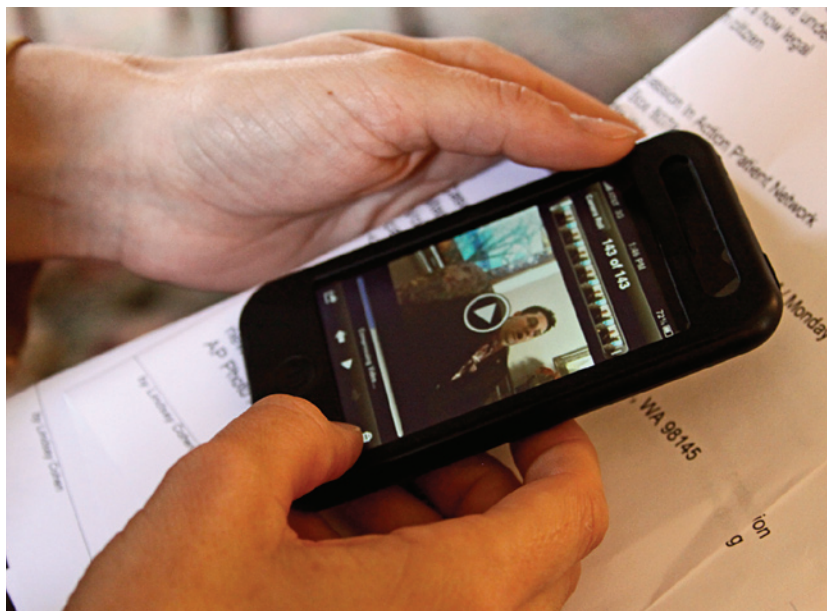
This is not only beneficial to the user, but also to advertisers because it provides targeted demographics. Once someone visits the home site and defines a neighborhood, the technology tracks that person's clicks on the site and continues to serve them by providing targeted content and ads throughout their experience.

Satbir Khanuja, CEO of DataSphere and formerly employed by Amazon.com, says, "Technology has reached the point where you can apply content discovery in the scale of Amazon and Google."

The goal is to connect users with the right piece of content in as few clicks as possible. This is done by personalizing the home page, recommending related articles and making sure information is easily discoverable through search engines.

### **A new content distribution model**

KOMO receives a massive amount of daily incoming content, but its previous distribution techniques didn't enable all of that content to get published or broadcast. The hyperlocal sites are now an outlet. The station hired producers to aggregate all content that comes into the assignment desk. In addition, the broadcaster now publishes user-generated content.



**KOMO-TV in Seattle gave its reporters, photographers and anchors Apple iPhones so they can take pictures and upload news in the field.**

McGuire says, "If we can get people not only using our sites to check out what's going on, but also participating in it, then that's a home run."

For the staff to buy in to the new workflow, the technology needed to be easy to learn and use. The station purchased 80-plus iPhones, outfitting every reporter, photographer and anchor. Reporters can take photos with the iPhone, and the images are immediately ingested. Rights management technology allows content to be published through a fast lane to the

mic basis, so the station can eliminate duplication of effort and streamline the entire workflow.

The broadcaster now posts news to the Web on the neighborhood level early in the day. The conversation between the station and the community starts on the neighborhood hyperlocal site and continues throughout the day until the 6 p.m. newscast.

The TV station also relies on key community members to post content. For example, KOMO made a deal with local real estate agents because they're

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appropriate neighborhood site. So if a reporter is driving, he or she can take a picture and send it via e-mail as opposed to going into the station, logging into a self-service portal and uploading all the content. This process eliminates any friction in the pipeline flow of content, enabling information to get posted on the Web site without delays. One über content management system distributes content out on an algorithm-

ingrained in their community. Most of the agents drive around all day in the neighborhoods, and they all have cameras. They're able to provide the hyperlocal sites with non-real estate user-generated material, such as events going on in the area.

Because the Web sites tie the audience to a geography or topic, the station creates appropriate matchmaking with local advertisers.



**KOMO's producers aggregate all content that comes into the news desk and upload it onto the hyperlocal sites.**

**If you build it, they will come**

After three months, the initial results are positive. The sites are receiving increased traffic, and people in the community are participating in posting news.

On the revenue side of things, the hyperlocal sites have opened up a new set of advertisers that the station would ordinarily never do business with. For example, a local dry cleaner might not be interested in advertising with a local TV station because it will end up attracting eyeballs that will never do any business with it. But the dry cleaner is interested in advertising on the hyperlocal sites because of the matchmaking between the advertiser and the user at an appropriate neighborhood level.

Khanuja identifies four things a broadcaster needs in order to be successful at hyperlocal news. First, the station must have a brand that creates a positive feeling amongst users as well as advertisers. The second key is content — the bread and butter of broadcasters. The third step is working with a partner that can provide a technology platform offering content discoverability and segmented monetization. If Web site visitors can't

connect to the right kind of content quickly, they'll leave the site. Since employing search and discovering on KOMO's Web site, the search-related news has gone up by a factor of five.

Lastly, sometimes small- and medium-sized businesses that could be potential advertisers for a local TV broadcaster don't understand how to best market their products. They

launching another 20 to 30 sites in the Seattle market this month, with others in Bakersfield, Boise and Idaho Falls coming soon.

McGuire says, "Our mission is still the same. It hasn't changed in 50 years, and it's all about making a better connection with the people that we serve in our community. That's why we embrace the technology and use it

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don't know what it means when a broadcaster asks them to send a jpeg that's 300 x 250 pixels, and many don't even have a Web site. In addition, TV stations often don't employ enough sales staff to reach out to these smaller businesses. Broadcasters may find it beneficial to partner with a technology company that can help with local ad sales.

**Conclusion**

Fisher plans to extend the hyperlocal concept to all of its markets in the future; the media company is already

to find better ways to get content to them that's relevant to them. That's how you increase viewership on the TV side. We still believe in [TV]. This is a way to build two things at once."

In this rough economic whirlwind, TV stations have an opportunity to reach out to viewers and advertisers at little cost. The change starts in the newsroom with the staff embracing a new workflow and fortifying its on-line presence.

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*Angela Snell is a production editor for Broadcast Engineering.*