

BEYOND BROADCAST

DIGITAL EXPANSION FOR A CHANGING WORLD



Executive Summary:

The landscape of media consumption has changed drastically over the past decade and especially within the last few years. Spurred by the rapid growth of online platforms and the new realities of the COVID-19 pandemic, the digital space is journalism's new home. KUOW has made great strides to join the rapid digital expansion, including the strategic growth and cultivation of station audiences on social media and via emails and KUOW podcasts. The digital world is an ever-growing and shifting frontier. KUOW must continue to invest in quality digital reporting and tools in order to reach the next generation of consumers in need of fact-checked, trustworthy journalism that nurtures a more informed and engaged public.

Need for Digital Expansion: A Seismic Shift to Streaming

Over the past few years, KUOW has seen a rapid decline in broadcast listeners and a steady growth in streaming listeners. From 2019 to 2020, KUOW's monthly streaming listeners increased by 4% while the station's broadcast listeners decreased by 10%. KUOW podcasts experienced the most remarkable growth in 2020 resulting in an 87% increase in monthly downloads.¹ This stark audience shift is replicated on the national level. Audiences for traditional radio have reached a plateau, while new, younger audiences have turned to on-demand streaming platforms. A recent Edison Research study concluded that around 24% or 60 million Americans age 18 or older own a Smart Speaker.²

Many KUOW and NPR listeners are familiar with the fabled "Driveway Moment" describing the many times listeners waited to hear the end of a story before turning off the car and going inside. Cars are the last bastion of installed radios. It is estimated that by 2023, 70% of cars sold globally are expected to have a built-in internet connection.³ The data is clear: there is a growing preference for online, on-demand news options over traditional broadcast. In a recent audience survey, KUOW confirmed the station's assumption that its digital audiences are younger and more racially diverse than broadcast audiences. Of the digital consumer responses recorded, 7% identified as Gen Z, 6% identified as Millennial and 12% identified as a person of color.⁴ KUOW must equip reporters with the tools and software needed to package their stories across a wide array of platforms including web, broadcast, email, social media, video, podcast and live events. Only then can KUOW continue to meet current and future audiences — especially younger and more diverse listeners — where they are.



According to Edison Research, in 2018, only 50% of the people surveyed in the 18–34 age group reported owning a home radio, a reduction from 94% in 2008.

NPR & Edison Research

The Smart Audio Report,
Spring 2020

1. Triton and Podtrac, 2020.
2. The Smart Audio Report. (2020, April 30). NPR and Edison Research.
3. Is Radio Broadcast Industry in U.S. Dying. (2018). Edison Research.
4. Summer Audience Survey. (2020 July). KUOW.

Our Focus: Innovative Digital Reporting and Content

Through KUOW's 2016 Strategic Business plan, the station took bold steps to address the decline in broadcast listening by investing in strong and compelling digital services. The station has quickly adapted to a wide range of non-broadcast platforms to keep listeners engaged including podcasts, streaming, email, [smart speakers](#) and web. The demographics and needs of listeners are changing. KUOW plans to use digital tools and insights to keep current and future audiences engaged with diverse voices, regional content and trustworthy information.



Audio Streaming

As more KUOW listeners purchase smart speakers or download the KUOW app, streaming sessions continue to grow. Average monthly streaming audiences increased from 244,277 in 2018 to 263,155 in 2020.⁵ Despite work and lifestyle changes necessitated by the pandemic, only 13% of KUOW listeners surveyed said they've tuned in less since March 2020. In fact, 32% of respondents said they listen to KUOW more.⁶



Digital Content Direct to Inboxes

In January 2020, KUOW migrated to a more robust customer relationship management system: Salesforce integrated with Salesforce Marketing Cloud. Among many other benefits, this switch has allowed the station to track, retain and grow KUOW's email subscriber base. In November 2020, KUOW launched a new daily newsletter, *Today So Far*, as another convenient, trustworthy way to digest the news of the moment. KUOW's focus on email content grew annual subscriber totals from 28,000 in 2019 to 36,000 in 2020.⁷



Social Media Following

With a focus on consistent, meaningful news content, KUOW's Facebook page continues to be the second highest traffic driver to the station's website behind Google search. In 2020, 89% of users who visited KUOW.org from a social networking platform came from Facebook.⁸ KUOW has worked hard to connect users across social platforms, streaming virtual events and popular programming on the station's Facebook page and YouTube channel.

5. Triton, 2020.

6. Summer Audience Survey. (2020 July). KUOW.

7. KUOW Internal Records, 2020.

8. Google Analytics, 2020.

Aspirations: Building on Our Success with Your Support

Full-Time Staff Devoted to Digital Technology: KUOW is building a team to optimize KUOW storytelling across products and platforms. Digital tools are expensive and technical talent is in high demand. KUOW will be competing with tech giants like Amazon, Microsoft and others to attract the best of the best to help the station maximize engagement for interactive, immersive storytelling experiences.

Technology to Grow Audiences and Deepen Engagement: KUOW hopes to continue expanding the station's digital ecosystem to gain new audience insights and a holistic understanding of the many ways community members engage with KUOW. Tools like Salesforce, Source360 and GetFeedback offer opportunities to expand on current initiatives like KUOW's [Community Feedback Club](#), increasing engagement, growing content diversity and connecting audiences directly with the people behind KUOW's work.

Make Digital Accessibility the Norm: Despite the unexpected pivot to a completely virtual format in the spring of 2020, KUOW managed to increase overall event attendance from 6,249 in 2019 to 6,346 in 2020.⁹ Although that increase is small in comparison, it does not count the thousands of community members who continue to access KUOW event series and video content for free through the station's YouTube channel. The pandemic allowed KUOW to bring communities together without the physical barriers of a venue. The station hopes to continue providing digital access to all KUOW events in the future so everyone can share in new perspectives and thoughtful conversations in-person and from home.

Expected Results

Public radio is often associated with older, white audiences. The proliferation of internet platforms, smart software and on-demand content offers an unprecedented, data-driven opportunity for KUOW to engage with new, younger and more racially diverse audiences outside the daily broadcast. As a nonprofit, public media station, KUOW must invest in the array of digital delivery methods preferred by future audiences. By focusing on immersive, visual storytelling and local, community-centered content, KUOW can help equip the stakeholders and listeners of tomorrow with the tools and insight they will need to sustain our democracy and tackle the world's most pressing problems.