

**Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities in a Democracy**  
**“Meeting the Public’s Information Needs in Silicon Valley”**

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My thanks to the Knight Commission for hosting today's event and bringing us all together.

It is appropriate that the Knight Commission chose Silicon Valley as its first case study, because Silicon Valley is the leader in the nation’s technology innovation, and it’s also the leader in new media.

Over the many years I visited Northern California before coming to live here, I was always struck by its geography. A colleague, Greg Farrington of the California Academy of Science, put it well when he described the West as a place with big mountains, big ocean and big sky. Looking at Silicon Valley, I would add to that description: big thinking.

There is no where else in the nation, if not the world, that places more value on thought leadership. When you make that drive on Highway 280 south from San Francisco, you get that immediate sense of “can do.” Those endless vistas, those unspoiled wide open spaces of raw land, that lead to unending possibilities. It's as though you feel you could bottle up all that natural beauty and energy and transform it into big thinking.

And that's what Silicon Valley represents most to me: open spaces...open thinking.

I grew up in the East—in Washington, D.C. I was born and raised in the city. And when you live in D.C. you can get caught up in that inside-the-Beltway feeling, where media is concentrated and stories take on more prominence by the sheer volume of journalists and media organizations based in the area.

But it's clear that media concentration from any one city or location is changing...and much of that change has been fueled by many big ideas coming right from this region, and many right from this campus—from Google. Communities are no longer defined by their geographic borders. Facebook and My Space have created huge communities where people never have meet in person...where there are no geographic borders.

Google has pioneered not only a hugely successful company, it has also fueled a new way of disseminating and consuming news and information. In this new media world, the consumer has become more of an editor, and the editor more of a curator. More tools are in the hands of the consumer and the editor. The consumer is more demanding. Silicon

Valley is truly turning the world of media upside down, and this has profound implications for communications of the future.

So what are the special information needs in Silicon Valley? Here are five broad areas that immediately come to my mind: technology and innovation, globalization and diversity, education, civic engagement, and the environment.

1. Technology and Innovation.

There's no question that this is a community of early adapters, and it's not just entrepreneurs and business leaders. We looked at a broad study of the various technologies people use to consume media—everything from large screen TVs, to broadband, to DVD players and TiVo. In almost every case, Bay Area consumer usage exceeded national levels. For media organizations, this means we need to present content when and where people want it—from the largest HD set to the smallest handheld mobile device. It's not enough to serve information needs in a “business as usual” format in this community.

And we also need to report on technology that's being created here—in so many new forms and formats. Not just the big obvious stories about Google, Yahoo and Apple, but also the stories of the next generation of entrepreneurs—what's working what's not. Where are the next big ideas? We in the media also need to be innovators. It's clear that traditional media has a major turning point. Do we embrace the disruptive technology or do we stand by our legacy core businesses?

On ZDNet, there's a fascinating interview with Judy Estrin, former CTO of Cisco. She argues that Silicon Valley is losing its innovation edge of many years due to short-term thinking and Wall Street pressures on business to perform. She has a wonderful analogy of innovation as an ecosystem—that just as plants need water and sunshine, innovation needs nurturing...in the form of leadership, funding, education and culture. I would add to that robust communication. And that's the role of the media.

2. Globalization and Diversity.

This is a community that is driven by globalization on multiple fronts—jobs, business development, immigration issues, economic strategies and new endeavors are hugely dependent and intertwined with what happens globally. And the international community is also hugely interested in Silicon Valley. What happens in Silicon Valley *doesn't* stay in Silicon Valley! And in this region's case, that's a good thing. News here frequently has national and international implications. For media, that means many local stories need to be reported on as global stories. That requires a certain type of reporting expertise and knowledge not just of this community, but also of countries and people from India, Mexico, Japan and China...and how their economies are closely intertwined with Silicon Valley.

The other part of globalization is diversity. This is a community that needs to

hear the stories of our diverse voices and how they are contributing to our landscape.

NCPB Education Network curates a wonderful series called Digital Story Telling, where we invite students to create media. Our educator professional teams help them, but these stories represent the students' own creative voices. These videos are judged and the top examples shown on the air and online. I've been amazed at the stories that have been generated by these young people. In a series of digital stories themed "Coming to California," young people explored their own family histories and how their parents struggled to come to California. These stories are inspiring. We need more Digital Story Telling so we can tap more of our rich, diverse community and tell these compelling stories to a wide audience, using the power of media.

### 3. Education.

This community has thrived over the years with a base of scientists, technology experts and entrepreneurs. But where is the next generation of scientists? KQED produces a science and nature series called *QUEST* that is our most ambitious multi platform initiative ever, with a half-hour weekly TV program and regular reports on KQED Public Radio, the Internet and through our Education Network services. Before the series started, the station looked at media surveys that showed an alarming decline in the coverage of scientific principles and research, many of which affect our daily lives. A 2004 survey by the American Communications Foundation indicated that watching cable news for 24 continuous hours would lead to about one minute of science coverage! Clearly there is a huge void in our media on this topic. *QUEST* began to fill a critical need in this region to inform and educate and get people excited about science—not only adults, but students as well. And we know it's working: just one single segment we produced on nanotechnology has already generated 212,000 views online (on YouTube)!

And beyond our broadcast and online activities, we place a strong emphasis on education for *QUEST*. Our team has produced educator guides that will live on well beyond the original broadcast or webcast. Just last week, we learned that a UK school managed by the Physics and Ethics Education Project, based at Bristol University in England, contacted *QUEST* about embedding a video segment on the site to provide additional education resources. This is a good example of filling a need for science coverage, and also extending the reach beyond the local community.

### 4. Civic Engagement.

This is a community hungry for civic engagement. I have worked in broadcasting for more than 30 years, following and covering communities and business stories from all over the nation. I can honestly say I've never known a community more passionate and excited about news—especially national and international news. Over the past 19 months we have seen intense audience response to coverage of

the primaries and the conventions. KQED Public Radio, whose largest audience is from Santa Clara County, extensively covered the California primary—with our local team and bureaus from around the state, as well as NPR reports. During that period, Arbitron reported that KQED Public Radio had the largest audience of any public radio station in the nation—not just in 2008, but the largest audience among public radio stations ever recorded. We know the election coverage and the appetite for it was a contributing factor.

In the past two weeks, both KQED Public Radio and KQED Public Television have been broadcasting the political conventions. We won't know the audience size for radio right away, but we did see overnight ratings for TV, and the audiences were stunning. On most nights, viewership for the special *NewsHour* coverage on KQED outdistanced all of the commercial and cable broadcasters in our region.

I think at its core, the major reason for this is that people want election news in a straightforward format from a trusted source that will provide analysis and historical context. Clearly, they liked the gavel-to-gavel coverage. It's this kind of objective, unbiased news that in my mind is critical to our democracy. We're also seeing a large appetite and interest in online activities and community forums, where viewers and listeners can join in the dialogue.

#### 5. The Environment.

I started out talking about the physical beauty of this location—it is breath taking. It's clear that the people of the South Bay and beyond have a long history and deep respect for that natural beauty and the land and water here. People care about recycling...about alternative energy sources...and stewarding resources for future generations. At our San Jose station, KTEH, we have been covering Joint Venture: Silicon Valley Network's State of the Valley conference for the past two years. I have been amazed at the intense interest by business leaders in solar, hybrids, and other clean tech approaches. It's clear these leaders are thinking not just of the environment, but also how clean tech has large and continuing implications for business and the economy.

So there you have it—five top information needs for Silicon Valley. There are, of course, many other issues that Silicon Valley faces along with the rest of the nation—housing affordability, roads and infrastructure, and health care, to name a few. But technology, globalization, education, civic engagement and the environment have a special focus for this region and its great legacy of open land and open thinking.