

History, Drama, and Culture

Building Community Around Brands

“It’s a tremendously opportune moment for those who support the idea that the more we know about the struggles of the past, the better equipped we are to deal with the incredible challenges of this century.” —Mark Samels, Executive Producer, *American Experience*

How does our past inform the present? What can great stories teach us about ourselves? To what extent can public media bring us together as a nation around the art and history that define us? Where can we go to engage with our artistic past and to discover the trends shaping our cultural future?

As Americans, our lives are enriched by such questions. And WGBH’s extraordinary achievements in cultural, historical, and artistic programming help us explore them ever more deeply.

Television’s most-watched history series for nearly three decades, *American Experience* documentaries have received 30 Emmy® awards, four duPont-Columbia Awards, 17 Peabody Awards, and nine Academy Award® nominations. The series was founded to hold a lens to the meaning of our collective American heritage. Today, *American Experience* continues to pursue a mission of tireless advocacy for the vitality of our past. The series is unparalleled in its pursuit of filmic and historical excellence.

As a retired U.S. Marine said about *American Experience's* most recent Oscar®-nominated film, *Last Days in Vietnam*, “What you all have done for Vietnamese-Americans and Vietnam veterans far transcends the history lesson you are teaching us.” The series’ role in national life has never been more important nor its mission more urgent. Without history to anchor us, we drift apart. In these divisive times, knowing what we have shared—the struggles, victories, and defeats—can help bind us together as Americans.

Since its creation in 1971, *Masterpiece*, the longest-running dramatic series in American television history and the winner of virtually every television award including 83 Emmy® awards and 19 Peabody Awards, has exemplified excellence in the dramatic arts.

In addition, Boston area arts are well covered by WGBH television and radio. As 99.5 WCRB classical radio, owned by WGBH since 2010, continues to grow its classical audience, the station is becoming a robust digital media brand in its own right.

Leveraging Online Engagement

The fact that digital has overtaken media production and consumption does nothing to lessen our timeless yearning for great art, peerless storytelling, and cultural engagement. “Long, deeply-involving multi-part series, whether it be *Wolf Hall*, *Poldark*, or *The Durrells in Corfu*, are at the very heart of what we do at *Masterpiece*, more than ever these days,” says Rebecca Eaton, Executive Producer of *Masterpiece*. “Now, in the digital era, our audience can watch programs the way they might read a good book: by watching as many hours as they choose at one sitting, and by watching whenever they want. It makes us competitive and viewer-friendly in a very crowded television landscape.”

Ultimately, the digital world opens up greater opportunity. At WGBH, we can do more to saturate media with excellence—on social media, in streaming video, and through deeper engagement with audiences. But only if we can harness the power of digital media with the talent, the freedom to innovate, and the nimble cross-media projects that fully leverage its potential.

Audience engagement teams at WGBH utilize social media and online communications to increase the reach of WGBH content. *American Experience* and *Masterpiece* have such teams in place. Expanding their use throughout

the organization will increase the reach of WGBH content on new platforms for new audiences. It will drive additional collaboration between and among producers and WGBH Digital Services, to the benefit of all.

Next Generation Media

Working together to expand enterprise-wide, mission-driven data collection, we will become better at gauging audience viewing preferences and habits, understanding engagement with WGBH, and more. “We need better ways to collect audience insights so that we can create the next generation of highly personalized, interactive WGBH experiences,” says Vice President of Digital Services Bob Kempf. “This campaign can contribute significantly to the effort.”

“Merging the digital and the long-form broadcast into one, all-encompassing audience engagement strategy helps us build community around our programming,” adds Vice President of National Programming John Bredar.

American Experience embraced this strategy for *The Great War*, partnering with the U.S. WWI Centennial Commission to connect the series’ content with millions of military history enthusiasts. By working directly with external partners and stations, *The Great War* social content reached 3.8 million Facebook video views and a hashtag reach of 55 million leading up to the film’s premiere, which was viewed by 10.1 million people. Additionally, our content production in the digital space creates a 24/7/365 presence for the *American Experience* brand, allowing us to meet our audiences where they are with the powerful storytelling they have come to expect. As we look to the future, access to capital is key to our continued expansion into digital content and our understanding of audiences across the enterprise.

Free streaming of *Masterpiece's* “Downton Abbey,” the most popular dramatic series in PBS history, has delivered the six-season program via the PBS apps for iOS and Android devices to station-branded digital platforms including Roku, Apple TV, Amazon Fire TV, and Chromecast. Seven million plus unique visitors to the *Masterpiece* website since January 1, 2016 have come seeking “Downton” content. Winner of two Webby awards in its inaugural year, the newly launched podcast *Masterpiece Studio* has had nearly 7 million podcast downloads and ranks among iTunes’ top podcasts. These statistics indicate the reach of WGBH content on a range of digital platforms. With support, they point to extraordinary opportunities ahead.

Recommitting to the Classics

WGBH has always innovated in the name of the arts. We pioneered the “simulcast” in 1955, pairing FM stereo high-fidelity sound with a televised performance by the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the first broadcast of its kind. When WGBH purchased long-time commercial radio station 99.5 WCRB, we saved classical music programming on radio in Boston. Since 2014, the “new” 99.5 WCRB, greater Boston’s only 24/7 classical music radio station, has risen to become a ratings powerhouse, serving approximately 250,000 people per week in Boston and surrounding communities. Our live and local focus sets us apart. Indeed, 99.5 WCRB averages 54 minutes of music per hour, more than any other classical music station in the country.

In the course of a year, 99.5 WCRB will produce and air every weekly Boston Symphony Orchestra concert live from Symphony Hall and more than 20 concerts from Tanglewood, far more than any other station in the country does in collaboration with its local orchestra. A series called WCRB IN CONCERT broadcasts many of the finest concerts produced in the Boston region. During its inaugural season, the program partnered with more than 20 music ensembles and presenters.

Reflecting the station’s leadership role, 99.5 WCRB has just completed an agreement to become the media partner for the Leonard Bernstein Centennial, which will be celebrated throughout 2018 with broadcasts, live events, and nationally available web and mobile content. The Centennial will find a national digital home at a new WGBH/WCRB website, classical.org. Streaming audio and video content and linking to a wealth of material, this exciting new website and the opportunities it makes possible represent WGBH’s commitment to expanding audiences for classical music in the digital century.

Asserting Digital Leadership

As the nation increasingly turns to digital media for exposure to and engagement with art, culture, and history, WGBH must consolidate its position as the leader in excellent, relevant, trusted media that informs and engages—on all platforms and across the enterprise.