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Our New Community Broadband Awards Program

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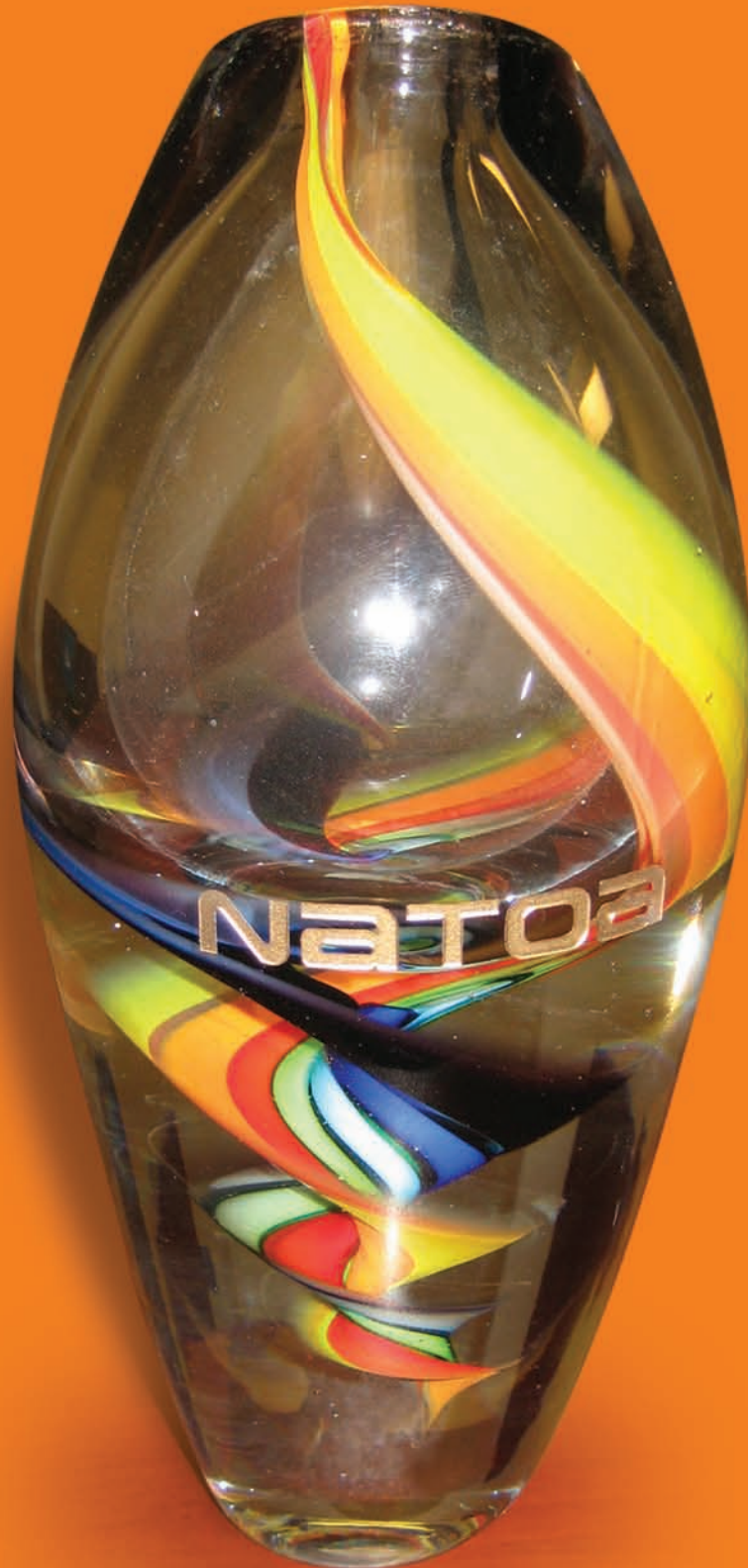
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The SEATTLE CHANNEL Art Zone

By Gary Gibson

Introduction

In early 2007, the SEATTLE CHANNEL launched a new service called Art Zone, bringing 12 hours a week of local arts and cultural programming to 187,000 cable households in Seattle, and bringing the same programming to the Internet via the SEATTLE CHANNEL website.

Launch of the Art Zone has been an unqualified success, with positive viewer feedback, extensive media coverage, and rapid growth in web traffic. Page views at the SEATTLE CHANNEL website have grown as much as 25 percent per month since the Art Zone launch, so that August 2007 web traffic was four times what it was in August 2006.

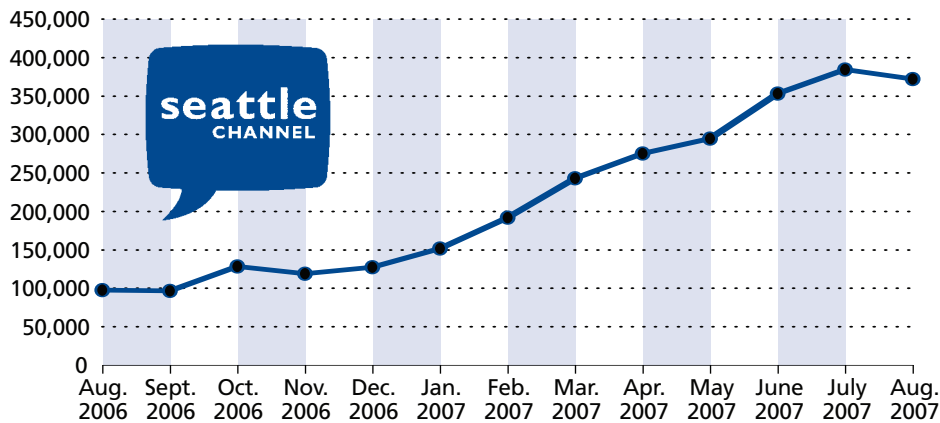
How did this come to be? A rare combination of factors made it possible for the SEATTLE CHANNEL to create the new Art Zone service—a wired and web-savvy populace; a cable company interested in supporting the community; and a vibrant arts scene lacking a home on TV and the web.

Seattle's World Renown Arts Community

Seattle has one of the most vibrant arts and cultural communities in the United States. Arts and music are both a cultural catalyst and an economic driver for the region—with 4,000 arts related businesses, 20,000 arts workers, and millions of dollars of annual impact. More Puget Sound residents go to arts events than attend professional sports, and the arts are inseparable from the city's cutting-edge image around the world.

However, like nearly every other city in the country in the past decade, Seattle's local commercial media have moved away from coverage of local

SEATTLECHANNEL.ORG Monthly Page Views



arts and culture. In Seattle, a city known *worldwide* for its music, literary, visual arts and theater artists, local residents have been without any consistent video coverage of arts offerings in their own city. Meanwhile, national and international broadcasters were frequent visitors to Seattle, drawn by the work of world-renowned glass artist **Dale Chihuly**; late musicians **Kurt Cobain** and **Jimi Hendrix**; authors **Tom Robbins**, **Timothy Egan**, **David Guterson** and **Nancy Pearl**; **Seattle Opera**; **Pacific Northwest Ballet**; and the Tony-award winning **Seattle Repertory Theatre** and **Intiman Theatre**. By the late 1990s, the local commercial TV stations that once had full-time arts reporters—previewing and reviewing music, plays, books, galleries, exhibits and performances—had none. Public TV stations in the Seattle area were focused on fundraising initiatives and on national programming, and no local arts alternative on TV or the web emerged.

In addition, migration to the Seattle area meant that 1/3 of the population had moved to the city within the previous decade, creating a vast potential audience with no exposure to local arts and culture via electronic media.

The Solution: Convergence

The SEATTLE CHANNEL, recipient of numerous programming awards

(including Emmys, NATOA GPAs and a “Best Local Public TV Station” nod from the *Seattle Weekly*), decided to tackle the problem, and to seize a terrific opportunity to provide a valuable community service.

Encouraged by a visionary citizens’ advisory group who in 2001 saw the future of TV programming on the web, the SEATTLE CHANNEL moved forward to make this vision a reality. The SEATTLE CHANNEL made necessary investments in software and hardware to stream live and build an online video archive. Then, as part of the city’s franchise agreement negotiation in 2005, the

SEATTLE CHANNEL secured major financial support from Comcast to launch *Art Zone*. With a \$5 million grant (\$500,000 a year for 10 years), the SEATTLE CHANNEL created an innovative, first-in-the-nation project that creates programming celebrating local arts and culture and puts it simultaneously on TV and the Internet.

SEATTLE CHANNEL staff are motivated by a belief that it is critical for all TV stations (not just government channels) to simultaneously continue to serve the traditional audience (those who still watch TV mostly or only on TV), along with the growing audience of people who watch TV mostly or only on their computers and other portable devices. As resource intensive as this approach can be, serving both hemispheres of the audience with equal attention to viewer service results in a better channel now, and a channel better prepared for the future.

By adopting this convergence model now, *Art Zone* programming is readily accessible to all 2 million residents within the Seattle metropolitan area—not just those 187,000 households within the traditional government channel service area.

Creating *Art Zone* Content

To create *Art Zone* content, the SEATTLE CHANNEL conducted a series of focus groups, formal meetings and informal conversations with members of the arts and cultural community, all of whom enthusiastically welcomed the *Art Zone* initiative. To produce programming, the station partners with community artists and arts groups, musicians and venues, filmmakers and theatres, for interviews with artists and curators; behind-the-scenes peeks at galleries, theaters, museums, and concert venues; and in-depth portraits of the familiar and the unexpected that encourage people to buy tickets and attend concerts, plays, shows, and exhibits.



Art Zone launch poster

Art Zone was soft launched in late October 2006, and formally debuted with motion-graphics branding in early 2007.

New programs for the launch included a variety of shows designed to highlight various key segments of Seattle's arts and cultural scene, such as:

***BIG NIGHT OUT
with Kevin Joyce***

A one-hour TV variety show with comedy, music, and dance hosted by local performer and raconteur Kevin Joyce and taped in front of a live audience at a historic neighborhood theater south of downtown Seattle.

Verve

A 30-minute program showcasing a wide range of local artists, both known and undiscovered, examining creative processes, studio/work environments and inspirations.

The Local Music Show

A 30-minute showcase for local musicians and their music videos, hosted by John Richards from Seattle radio station KEXP (one of the most popular radio stations nationally and internationally on the web).

REEL Short Movies

An hour-long program presenting four to five short films produced by local filmmakers, in partnership with the Northwest Film Forum.

A Guide to Visitors

A 30-minute program showcasing three compelling storytellers, with host Jeannie Yandel, a local public radio personality.

CINEMA 21

A full-length local feature film, presented in partnership with

Seattle's film festival and cinema community.

Existing SEATTLE CHANNEL Arts Programming

Existing series, including *City A Go Go* with Nancy Guppy (bi-weekly look at current arts and cultural happenings), *Book Lust* with Nancy Pearl (monthly author interviews with uber-librarian Nancy Pearl); and *American Avant Garde* with Karl Krogstad (a monthly program about emerging film artists) were folded into the *Art Zone*. Furthermore, the *Art Zone* also now encompasses existing long-form coverage of readings, lectures, and performances produced by local non-profit partners.

It is important to point out that a common element in all SEATTLE CHANNEL *Art Zone* programs is that rather than simply document artists and arts groups, *Art Zone* seeks to build and strengthen community by informing people, and inspiring and encouraging them to go out and take part in the region's rich cultural life. We consider our programs successful when they inspire viewers to go out and experience in person what they've seen on their screens.

Results of Art Zone's First Year

Viewer feedback has been positive, with links from earned media generating significant new web traffic, and word-of-mouth generating a palpable community "buzz" for the *Art Zone*. In addition to being available on basic cable and via the Internet, *Art Zone* programs are now also available in the video-on-demand area of Comcast Digital throughout western Washington. Further, podcasts of select *Art Zone* programs were introduced in May 2007 and are among the SEATTLE CHANNEL's most popular offerings on iTunes.

In April, the newly redesigned *Art Zone* portion of the SEATTLE CHANNEL website was recognized with a national award from the Public Technology Institute (PTI). The PTI Web Services Award was presented to the SEATTLE CHANNEL for creating a groundbreaking system to provide the community with high-quality local arts and cultural content via TV and the web.

The result of the *Art Zone* initiative—12 hours of weekly Seattle arts and cultural programming—is something that benefits everyone who lives in the city, and that will continue to do so throughout the life of the project. *Art Zone* programs reflect and inspire Seattle's diverse communities, and will continue to do so for growing numbers of TV viewers and web users. Seattle's artists, arts groups and cultural organizations are a dynamic force in this city, and the *Art Zone* utilizes the best of the city's communications infrastructure to create a stronger link between the artists and the audience. Arts and culture are integral to Seattle's past, present, and future, and the *Art Zone* is, too. ■

Gary Gibson became General Manager of the SEATTLE CHANNEL, the city's civic and cultural affairs TV station in 2002. He has been producing television for more than 30 years, including numerous programs for PBS, such as Chihuly Over Venice. Previously, Gary served as Vice President for Production at Seattle PBS affiliate KCTS, where he oversaw all program production including the acclaimed "Over" aerial series; the American Masters special Vaudeville; The Seattle Symphony Live from Benaroya Hall; and Stanley Kramer on Film. Gary is a recipient of the George Foster Peabody Award and numerous Emmys.